

Manual for assessors

Step by step Victoria

A competency-based resource
for assessing potential foster carers

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Implementation of Step by step in Victoria

Step by step Victoria is based on the Step by step package developed in New South Wales. The material has been adapted for use by Victorian community service organisations that deliver foster care, including shared family care, adolescent community placement and intensive home-based care.

The benefits of community service organisations using common foster carer assessment and training materials are that it will achieve consistency in approach to the assessment and training of applicant foster carers, improve outcomes for children and young people in home-based care, increase professionalism of the foster carer role, provide for portability of accreditation and the ability of foster carers to move between community service organisations, and allow sharing of resources across community service organisations, particularly in the delivery of foster carer training.

A central reference group was formed to oversee the development and implementation of a common foster carer assessment and training approach in Victoria. Representation on the central reference group was drawn from a range of community service organisations and peak bodies, including the Foster Care Association of Victoria, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, and the CREATE Foundation. Four Department of Human Services regions were represented, as well as the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Professional Development Unit, the Child Protection and Family Services Indigenous Initiatives Unit, the Child Protection and Family Services Placement and Support Unit, and the Office of the Advocate for Children in Care.

In addition to this, each Department of Human Services region identified regional working groups and contacts to ensure effective communication about the project. The regional working groups included representatives from each community service organisation within the regions, as well as foster carers.

A comparative analysis of existing assessment and training materials from four jurisdictions was undertaken in the initial stages of the project. The central reference group decided to use the *Step by step* competency-based assessment package and the *Shared stories, shared lives* pre-service training package developed in New South Wales by the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies and funded by the New South Wales Department of Community Services.

The rationale for this decision was based on the following factors:

- *Step by step* is competency-based and provides a clear framework for making assessments based on evidence of skills.
- some community service organisations in Victoria were already using the *Step by step* package.
- other states and territories are also using or have adapted the materials.
- *Step by step* fits with the national direction towards the competency-based approach as agreed by ministers in the *National plan for foster children, young people and their carers 2004–2006*.

The Victorian Department of Human Services acknowledges that copyright of the *Step by step* and *Shared stories, shared lives* packages is held by and remains the property of the New South Wales Department of Community Services. The New South Wales Department of Community Services has granted permission for the Department of Human Services to adapt and use these packages in Victoria.

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Introducing Step by step Victoria

This booklet is part of *Step by step Victoria*, a resource package to assist foster care community service organisations in assessing potential foster carers.

The package contains seven booklets.

Background paper

An outline of the research and practice base for the package.

Familiarisation guide

A detailed outline for a two-day workshop to familiarise assessors with the package and how to use it.

Foster care information pack

A resource for people making enquiries about being a foster carer which can be adapted to the particular needs of your community service organisation. This information pack was developed in Victoria by the Department of Human Services in collaboration with the Foster Care Association of Victoria, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the CREATE Foundation and home-based care community service organisations.

Manual for assessors

A detailed outline of the assessment activities undertaken with applicants.

Applicant booklet

A collection of handouts and worksheets used by the applicant during the assessment interviews.

Assessment record

A tool for recording and analysing information gathered in the assessment process.

Assessment resources

A collection of materials to support the assessment process.

Key

 This symbol indicates booklets that can be downloaded by authorised community service organisations as a pdf file from the Department of Human Services' Funded Agency Chanel at <https://fac.dhs.vic.gov.au/>

 This symbol indicates booklets that can be downloaded by authorised community service organisations as a Word file (able to be altered or containing forms that can be completed on computer) from the Department of Human Services' Funded Agency Chanel at <https://fac.dhs.vic.gov.au/>

Additional printed copies

For additional hard copies of booklets, contact:

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Acknowledgements (Victoria)

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Nora Risso	Project Officer, Department of Human Services Placement and Support, Child Protection and Family Services
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Michael White	Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

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The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies would like to acknowledge the following organisations which have produced and made available material relating to assessment of foster carers:

- Anglicare (Sydney) Child and Family Services
- Barnardos Australia
- Berry Street Victoria
- British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering
- Centacare Sydney
- KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc
- Macarthur District Temporary Family Care
- National Foster Care Association, Britain
- New South Wales Department of Community Services
- St Luke’s Anglicare, Bendigo
- Wesley Dalmar Child and Family Care
- UnitingCare Burnside.

In particular, the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies would like to acknowledge the following organisations for giving permission to adapt specific activities or forms developed within their organisations for use in Step by step:

- Barnardos Australia: criteria for applicants used in the *Foster care information pack*
- KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc: assessment process flowchart in the *Foster care information pack*
- New South Wales Department of Community Services: covering letter to applicant’s doctor and the code of conduct for authorised foster carers in the *Assessment resources*.

Introduction

This *Manual for assessors* is part of a package called *Step by step Victoria*, a competency-based resource for assessing potential foster carers.

Step by step Victoria is an exciting development in the area of foster care assessment. Not only does it provide systematic ways to engage with applicants and share information with them, but it provides a means to use that information to reach an informed decision about the suitability of fostering as an option for applicants.

The *Step by step Victoria* resource package contains a range of material to assist the applicant and the assessors to make an informed decision about the applicant's suitability to undertake the tasks of foster caring.

Why was the package developed?

The original *Step by step* package was part of a wider project to increase the capacity of the foster care system to provide quality care for children and young people.

Stage 1 of the project in New South Wales saw the development of a training course for new and prospective foster carers called *Shared stories, shared lives* (recently adapted for use in Victoria as *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria*).

Step by step Victoria (adapted from New South Wales' *Step by step*) provides resources to assist community service organisation workers to assess the competency of people who are applying to be foster carers. The package is flexible and can be used in conjunction with the *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria* training. This course is available in both printed and electronic form from the Department of Human Services. Contact details for the department are earlier in this manual.

Developing the package

Current writing, practice wisdom and research in the area of foster care assessment informed the development of the *Step by step Victoria* package. The *Background paper* included in the package sets out the current issues and research findings in this area.

Key findings that guided the development of *Step by step Victoria* can be summarised by the following excerpt from the *Background paper* (page 7):

‘The challenge for this project is to combine the strengths of the task-centred competency approach with strengths drawn from the psychodynamic approach to foster care assessment, which focuses on process and relationships. This can provide the means by which foster carers and workers can engage in a dynamic and creative process, which will enable foster carers and workers to understand:

- a carer’s motivation, attitudes, values and beliefs
- a clear understanding of the skills that potential carers have to offer.’

To meet this challenge, the *Step by step Victoria* assessment process incorporates:

- A **set of criteria** against which to assess applicant’s competencies.
- A focus on identifying **applicant’s strengths**.
- A **two-way decision making process**. The assessment is seen as a mutual process where applicants have the opportunity and responsibility to provide information for the assessors, and the assessors provide information that enables applicants to make an informed decision about fostering. This is within the context that the assessing community service organisation holds the ultimate responsibility for approval of applicants.
- Development of a **plan of action**. Such a plan can set out pathways into fostering for those applicants who need to develop skills in certain areas. Ongoing training and development needs of foster carers are identified from the outset. An expectation is created that foster carers will participate in ongoing training and continue to learn throughout their experience as foster carers.
- A **transparent process**, which is explicit about the skills required and assists applicants to develop them. Applicants understand what fostering involves, what standards they are being judged against and are given feedback.

Foster carer competencies

A central task in developing assessment material is to identify the competencies that are to be assessed. A set of competencies relevant to the task of foster caring within an Australian context was developed for the original project, which drew on:

- New South Wales Standards for Substitute Care Services
- the underpinning principles of the *Children and Young People (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW)
- competencies set out in the draft National Community Services Training Package
- existing competency standards in the United Kingdom (produced by the National Foster Care Association)
- research findings relating to effective and ineffective caring.

Four essential competencies were identified. These competencies were validated through a thorough consultation process involving experienced practitioners, including caseworkers and foster carers. The competencies are as follows.

Competent foster carers can:

- demonstrate personal readiness to become a foster carer
- work effectively as part of a team
- promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care
- provide a safe environment that is free of abuse.

These competencies are set out in detail on pages 9–13.

These competencies are consistent with Victoria's *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* and the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, as well as key documents that guide the operation of foster care in Victoria, such as the *Minimum standards and outcome objectives for home-based care services in Victoria*.

The assessment process

The assessment process involves a number of steps as the potential applicant moves from the enquiry and application stages through to the interviews and the final decision. The following flowchart sets out this process for an applicant.

Steps to becoming a foster carer

In Victoria, different foster care community service organisations process applications in slightly different ways. Some community service organisations commence assessment before training, others conduct training first, while still others undertake concurrent assessment and training. Some community service organisations will conduct general information sessions, while others will conduct an initial home visit in your home.

The following is a general outline of the steps involved in becoming a foster carer:



Using the *Step by step Victoria* package

Who should use this package?

Community service organisation workers who have the responsibility to assess foster care applicants should use this package.

Assessors must have:

- Knowledge and skills in the areas covered by the package. This must include a good understanding of issues impacting on children and young people in care, such as grief and loss, attachment theory, abuse and neglect, dynamics of providing foster care (including the potential impact on foster care families), and the current legislation, as well as the community service organisation's policy shaping the practice of foster care.
- Experience in interviewing to gather and analyse information.
- Understanding of the principles of assessment and gathering evidence.
- Capacity to reflect and critique information which takes into account their own experiences, assumptions and cultural background.

Assessors must have undertaken a familiarisation program in the *Step by step Victoria* package. The *Familiarisation guide* in the package details a complete outline for a two-day familiarisation workshop so such a program can be conducted in-house.

Two assessors should be present at any assessment activity. This provides for a more objective assessment and enables the sharing of interviewing and note-taking tasks. It also provides the opportunity for an inexperienced worker to participate with a more experienced assessor.

How does the package relate to training?

This package is designed to assess an applicant's suitability at the entry point to fostering. Therefore, the applicant should undertake pre-service training as well as the assessment.

The package is designed with flexibility so that assessment and training can be approached in different ways according to the community service organisation's needs. Options include:

- training being completed prior to the assessment process
- training and assessment occurring concurrently
- the assessment process being conducted, with subsequent training highlighting any areas in which an applicant needs to develop further competence prior to the finalisation of the assessment.

Using this package when matching foster carers with particular placements

This package is for assessing the suitability of applicants for approval to be foster carers. It is not a tool for matching foster carers with particular children or young people. While much of the material gathered in the assessment process will help to match foster carers with individual children or young people, there will be additional information that may need to be gathered, particularly in dealing with children or young people with special or complex needs.

Examples of this include:

- gathering information about the community links of foster carers who identify as being Aboriginal, in order to be able to place Aboriginal children within the community to which they belong
- a detailed exploration of a foster carer's attitudes and knowledge of the issues involved for young people who are attracted to the same sex when a community service organisation is considering placing a gay or lesbian young person with that foster carer.

Possible use of *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria*: training material for foster carers and potential foster carers

The *Step by step Victoria* assessment package is designed to complement the *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria* training resource.

One suggested way of integrating the training and assessment processes is to hold assessment interviews after the relevant training session in the following sequence:

- Information exchange session held with applicant(s) and other household members
- Interview A held with applicant(s)
- applicant(s) complete sessions one to four of *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria*, covering:
 - the context of foster care
 - bonding and attachment
 - grief and loss
 - maintaining connections
- Interview B held with applicant(s)
- interview held with children and young people in applicant's household
- applicant(s) complete sessions five and six of *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria*, covering:
 - the experience of abuse
 - responding to challenging behaviours
- Interview C held with applicant(s)
- applicant(s) complete sessions seven and eight of *Shared stories, shared lives Victoria*, covering:
 - team work
 - moving on
- Interview D held with applicant(s).

Outline of competencies of foster carers

Assessing competency

The assessment process outlined in this manual provides a tool to explore aspects of an applicant's experience in order to make an informed decision about their competency to undertake the task of being a foster carer.

The competencies

Four essential competencies of foster carers have been identified. On pages 9–13 of this manual, each of these competencies is broken down into elements with specific performance indicators.

Competency A: Demonstrate personal readiness to become a foster carer

This unit covers the requirement to recognise and apply relevant personal experiences to the task of caring for children and young people in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
Identify personal issues that may affect the decision to become a foster carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies motivation to become a foster carer, which includes a focus on the needs of children and young people in foster care Identifies in own life history experiences that may have impacted on emotional stability, resilience and the ability to deal with stress Identifies quality of relationships within family of origin <i>(If applicable)</i> Identifies issues relating to own children that may be relevant to the decision to become a foster carer
Reflect on experience, capacity and readiness to become a foster carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates that own experiences of grief and loss will not impede the provision of appropriate support to a child or young person in foster care Identifies a range of enduring emotional attachments <i>(If applicable)</i> Identifies a process of resolution of issues associated with infertility which will ensure the applicant can focus on the needs of a child or young person in care Demonstrates ability to deal with stress constructively
Determine the course of action to be followed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies relevant information, including needs of children and young people in care and any risk to self and family, to determine capacity to become a foster carer Identifies areas of concern and workable strategies to address them Describes realistic commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge

Competency B: Work effectively as part of a team

This unit covers the requirement to operate and communicate collaboratively with personal networks, community service organisation staff, families of children in care and other key people involved in the Looking After Children care and placement plan and the statutory case plan for the child or young person in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
Network effectively with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies sources of personal and emotional support that will enable them to focus on the needs of a child or young person in foster care • Identifies the potential impact of foster caring on their existing support networks • Describes potentially positive outcomes of working as a team within foster care
Establish a positive relationship with family members of child or young person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies strategies to promote ongoing contact between a child or young person in foster care, their family and other people with whom they have significant relationships • Describes ways of managing communication and conflict effectively to keep opportunities open for a positive relationship between the child or young person in foster care and their family
Communicate appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates clearly • Seeks clarification when required • Uses skills of assertive communication when appropriate • Describes strategies to resolve conflict and misunderstandings

Competency C: Promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care

This unit covers the requirement to provide and advocate for the developmental and special needs of children and young people in foster care, including the need to promote the development of a positive identity and their active participation in decision making.

Element	Performance criteria
Promote the social, emotional, psychological and intellectual development of children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies importance of individual attention for each child or young person which is responsive to his or her needs and development • Demonstrates ability to provide an environment that will stimulate a child or young person's development (for example, an age-appropriate daily routine) • Demonstrates ability to provide emotional warmth, care and appropriate affection to children and young people • Describes strategies to develop life skills in children and young people while in care • Identifies importance of promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in foster care
Promote exploration and development of identity by children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies ways of encouraging children and young people to take pride in their own cultural identity, gender identity and abilities • Describes opportunities for children and young people to participate in and learn about their cultural, religious and language heritage • Identifies the importance of sharing and safely storing memorabilia during the placement • Describes opportunities for children and young people to develop strengths, interests and abilities

Element	Performance criteria
Create opportunities and activities that encourage children and young people to express their feelings, needs and ideas and to participate in decisions that affect them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens attentively to children and young people to encourage them to express their needs and feelings • Identifies that children and young people's needs will vary with their stage of development • Recognises the need for children and young people in foster care to deal with feelings and issues that may arise from separation from their family • Identifies the importance of children and young people being involved in decisions that affect them
Manage behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies own personal responses that can impact on appropriate behaviour management • Describes effective strategies to manage behaviour of a child or young person which takes into account their development and life experiences and the foster carer's personal responses • Describes approaches to behaviour management which are flexible and responsive to changing situations
Advocate on behalf of children and young people in foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies specialist care, such as medical and educational services, as relevant for children and young people in foster care • Identifies importance of advocacy for the needs of children and young people in foster care in order to secure relevant services or support

Competency D: Provide a safe environment that is free of abuse

This unit covers the requirement to provide a safe and respectful home environment for children and young people in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
Provide a safe environment for the physical safety of children and young people in foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home meets minimum standards required for foster care placement • Identifies the need to ensure children and young people in foster care are not physically punished • Identifies importance of appropriate health and hygiene practices in foster carer's home
Implement care practices that support the protection of children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies impact of emotional abuse on children and young people • <i>(If applicable)</i> Demonstrates that the effect of their own experiences of abuse will not impede their ability to focus on the needs of a child or young person in foster care • Describes strategies to keep children and young people safe from abuse • Describes strategies to support and promote the wellbeing of the foster carer's own children during the foster care placement • Recognises the importance of maintaining confidentiality • Demonstrates the appropriate exchange of information on a need-to-know basis

Making assessments about competency

The assessment process is structured to allow applicants to provide information that is evidence that shows they are competent in each element necessary for effective foster caring.

Go signals



The assessors record evidence of the applicant's competency in the *Assessment record* so that a judgment can be made about whether the applicant has been able to adequately demonstrate their competence.

Assessment activities focus on specific competencies so that there is opportunity to regularly indicate the applicant's progress.

In this way, the assessors and the applicant can be given a signal to proceed (a 'go signal') before the next step in the assessment process.

Proceed with caution



In some circumstances, issues may arise in the assessment process that, while not conclusive, give rise to some concerns about the applicant's ability to fulfill essential competencies. This is the equivalent of a 'proceed with caution' road sign. It is appropriate for assessors to explore the relevant issue in depth and to ask questions additional to those provided in this *Manual for assessors* in order to be satisfied that the applicant is competent to undertake the task of foster caring.

Some examples of issues include:

- inappropriate response to a specific issue
- conflicting information provided by applicants
- applicant's preoccupation with a specific issue
- non-verbal information, such as a lack of emotional affect or incongruent body language.

It is not possible to provide questions to cover all situations; however, assessors should use the following guidelines to explore specific issues in depth:

- **Name the specific concern.** Ensure this concern is relevant to the applicant's ability to care for a child or young person in foster care.
- **Explore the information provided** which gave rise to your concern:
 - What was the context of the information?
 - Were there cultural, gender or class understandings that may have obscured the meaning of the information to the assessors?
- **Ask for further information or examples** to find out whether the concern is a part of a broader pattern or is isolated and unlikely to impact on behaviour as a foster carer.
- **Ask the applicant for their view** about the connection between the issue and their possible responses to a child or young person in foster care.
- **Seek information from other sources** that may provide additional perspectives (for example, from other people who know the applicant).
- **Consider** whether the issue arises from a lack of knowledge which may be addressed through training or other learning processes.

It is essential to clearly communicate with the applicant:

- the reason for exploring the particular issue in more depth
- the outcome of the exploration.

Outcomes of a 'proceed with caution' situation

Outcomes may include:

- The issue is satisfactorily resolved and the assessors resume the assessment process with no concerns about the applicant's competency related to that issue.
- There are some continuing concerns about the issue, but the information to be provided in later interviews will help to place these concerns in context. (In this case it is important to inform the applicants about the nature of your continuing concerns.)
- The concerns about the issues indicate that the applicant is not yet able to show competency to undertake the task of being a foster carer. At this outcome, the assessor should follow the steps set out as points one to four on the next page.



Stop signals

During the course of the assessment, applicants may provide material that is evidence that they are not competent to undertake the task of foster caring. This may involve an inability to carry out the basic tasks of foster caring or attitudes that are not consistent with provision of good care (for example, punitive attitudes to children, or racist or other judgmental views).

Assessment processes may also be stopped when specific information or a general pattern of responses emerges that is not consistent with the verbal or written information provided by the applicant. Such patterns may include:

- significant inconsistencies in factual information provided
- marked and persistent inconsistencies between the content of information being discussed and the affect and emotional response of the applicant
- presentation by applicant of grandiose or incredible information that is not supported by external evidence.

Such responses should be treated as a stop signal.

Four steps for dealing with a 'stop' signal

In the event of such a response, the assessors should complete the following steps:

1. Raise the issue with the applicant(s) and clearly indicate why their application will not proceed at this point. This may be done during the interview if appropriate or following the interview.
2. If possible, provide the applicant(s) with options for strategies to address significant issues and assure them that their application can be re-submitted if and when they believe the relevant issues have been addressed. There will be some instances where it is not appropriate for the applicant(s) to re-submit (for example, if their background criminal record reveals child sexual abuse).
3. Invite the applicant(s) to complete a 'Withdrawal of application' form (in Section 2 of the *Assessment record*), which includes space for applicant and assessor comments. Such comments should include the assessors' clear statement of the basis on which a re-application will be considered. The specific competency that was not met should be named on the form.
4. If the applicant(s) does/do not wish to withdraw their application, prepare an interim assessment recommendation report and submit it to the approval panel for a decision by the panel or the community service organisation about whether or not to continue the assessment. The applicant(s) may then decide they would like the decision reviewed or initiate a grievance.

1.1 Initial enquiry information

1.1.1 Date of enquiry

1.1.2 Name of worker

1.1.3 Name(s) of enquirer

1.1.4 Address

If address is outside the community service organisation boundaries, advise the enquirer.

1.1.5 Telephone

Home

Work

Mobile

Email

1.1.6 Date of birth of enquirer

If age of enquirer is outside community service organisation policy on age of foster carers, advise the enquirer.

1.1.7 Names and ages of all household members

(Include people who regularly stay overnight because if aged over 18 years they will need to have a police check and under certain circumstances may need a Working with Children Check)

Name:	DOB:	Relationship to enquirer:	Occupation:

Advise the enquirer that the process of assessing suitability to become foster a carer involves all household members, including children, in at least one information session. Adults in the household will also need to be part of training sessions.

1.1.8 If applicable, how long have you and your partner been together?

How long have you lived together?

If length of relationship is outside the community service organisation policy about this, advise the enquirer.

1.1.9 How did you hear about our foster care program?

1.1.10 Have you applied to any other community service organisations to foster or for permanent care or adoption (now or previously) in Victoria or elsewhere?*(Mark one)* Yes No

Any details provided

Explain that your community service organisation will only proceed if there are no other current applications, and your organisation will request information from previous applications from other community service organisations.

1.1.11 What has made you decide to call us today about fostering?

1.1.12 Are you interested in a particular type of fostering?*(For example, length of care, age range of child or young person)*

Explain types of care available through your community service organisation.

1.1.13 What work or other commitments on your time do you have?

Advise enquirer if the time they have available is not appropriate for the type of care they are interested in.

1.1.14 Are there likely to be any significant changes in your family over the next 12 months?*(For example, renovations, moving house, returning to work, changing work hours, students studying VCE, becoming grandparents, children moving out)**(Mark one)* Yes No

If yes, advise that assessment process will only start once their housing environment is stable.

1.1.15 Is there space in your home for a child or young person (or for another child or young person if you already have children)?*(For example, is there a spare bedroom and suitable play and homework space?)*

Advise enquirer if your community service organisation would not consider the space they describe adequate.

1.1.16 Do you plan to have any (or any more) children?*(Mark one)* Yes No

Please comment:

*If **yes**, explain that applications to foster are only considered once people are no longer involved in fertility or adoption processes because it is not helpful to start a foster placement with a child or young person that may be disrupted when the foster carer becomes pregnant or adopts a child.*

1.1.17 Have you had any involvement with the Department of Human Services (Child Protection) regarding allegations of abuse or neglect of any child or young person in your care?*(Mark one)* Yes No

Any details provided:

*If **yes**, explain that your community service organisation will not take an application if any allegation of abuse or neglect has been substantiated or is currently being investigated.*

1.1.18 Other issues

Add questions relating to any policies your community service organisation has about essential criteria for applicants; for example, religious affiliations or beliefs, smoking, police checks, health checks, home and environment check .

1.1.19 Questions asked by enquirer:**1.1.20 Briefly describe the process of application and assessment.**

Ensure the following topics are covered:

- need to check criminal record
- need for medical and referee checks
- anticipated length of process, including the number of interviews involved
- next step: the applicant to contact the community service organisation again after reading the *Foster care information pack*.

1.1.21 Do you want me to send out a *Foster care information pack*?

(Mark one) Yes No

Form completed by:

Assessor

Date

**At conclusion of enquiry, assessor to complete
Form 1.2 'Action sheet following enquiry'**

1.2 Action sheet following enquiry

(To be completed by assessor following enquiry)

1.2.1 Name of person making enquiry

1.2.2 Foster care information pack sent

(Mark one) Yes No

If **yes**, date sent:

Now go straight to section 1.2.6 at the end of this form.

If **no**, complete sections 1.2.3–1.2.6 below.

1.2.3 Please mark one of the boxes below and complete any necessary details.

Enquirer placed on waiting list because community service organisation is not recruiting at this time.

Enquirer did not fulfil the following essential criteria of our community service organisation.

Provide details:

Enquirer demonstrated inability to meet competencies.

Competency	Evidence that enquirer cannot demonstrate this competency*
Personal readiness	
Work as a team	
Promote positive development of child or young person	
Provide a safe environment	

*See pages 30, 48, 67, 83, 93 and 113 of this manual for examples of evidence indicating that competencies cannot be demonstrated.

Enquirer decided not to pursue their enquiry at this time.

Other

Provide details:

1.2.4 When and how was enquirer informed that community service organisation would not proceed: (mark one)

- During the initial telephone enquiry conversation
- Other

Provide details:

1.2.5 What other options (if any) were provided to enquirer?**1.2.6 Form completed by:**

Assessor

Date

1.3 Registration of interest in foster care

I have:

- read the *Foster care information pack* **and**
- would like to be contacted by a worker from your community service organisation to arrange an Information exchange session.

1.3.1 Your name

<i>First name</i>	<i>Last name</i>

1.3.2 Your address

1.3.5 Telephone

<i>Home</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Mobile</i>

1.3.4 Email address

1.3.5 Please complete for all members of your household

(include all people who regularly stay overnight and any children or young people who live elsewhere)

Name	Date of birth	Male/ female	Relationship to you

1.3.6 What language(s) do you speak at home?

1.3.7 Are you of Aboriginal background?

(Mark one) Yes No

1.3.8 Are you of Torres Strait Islander background?

(Mark one) Yes No

1.3.9 Have you previously applied to any other community service organisations to foster either in Victoria or elsewhere?

(Mark one) Yes No

If yes, please provide details and the result of the application:

1.3.10 What type of care are you interested in applying for, if known?

(Mark any you are interested in)

- Respite care
- Short term care
- Long term care

Please return to

[Name of community service organisation worker]

[Address of community service organisation worker]

2. Withdrawal of application

2.1 Details of withdrawal

(Name of applicant(s))

withdrew his/her/their application to be a foster carer on

(Date)

2.2 Reasons given for withdrawal by applicant(s)

2.3 Comment by assessor

Must include any advice given to the applicant(s):

- that a particular issue (or issues) indicated that the applicant(s) could not currently meet all required competencies*
- about possible strategies to address relevant issues before re-submitting an application.*

2.4 Signed

Assessor

Date

Applicant(s)

Date

Information exchange session

Preparing for this session

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- all members of applicant household (adults, young people and children who are living at home)
- if possible, an experienced foster carer.

It is useful for the assessors to make contact with all household members at the beginning of the assessment process. If some household members cannot be present at this session, it is important that a supplementary session be organised.

Location

This session is held face-to-face, and can be held at the home of the applicant(s). This enables the assessors to verify information relating to the home and to see the applicant(s) within a relaxed and familiar context. As an alternative, this session can be held at the community service organisation, and it may be community service organisation policy to hold the session at their office in order to ensure worker safety if there has been no previous contact with the applicant(s). If the session is held at a community service organisation and children will be attending, ensure there is one room set up with activities for children for the times when they will not be with their parent(s).

Length of session

This session will take approximately one-and-a-half hours. (This allows time to move between activities and to have a short break for the children if necessary.)

Before this session begins, it is possible to complete the check of the suitability of the house. (See Section 5.1 of the *Assessment record* for 'Home and environment check' to complete). An additional 30 minutes should be allocated for this.

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide an opportunity for:

- enquirers to have their initial questions about fostering answered
- assessors to provide information about the assessment process
- assessors to provide fundamental and practical details about fostering arrangements with the particular community service organisation
- enquirers to provide initial information about their family.

Material required

- copies of the *Foster care information* pack for each participant
- (if applicable) activities for quiet play for young children (for example, playdough, puzzles, electronic games and so on)
- drawing and writing material (large sheets of paper, markers)
- copies of the *Applicant booklet* (containing resource sheet IES.1 ‘Overview of Information exchange session’), also on page 38 of this manual
- a photocopy of resource sheet IES.2 (two pages), ‘Preparing a life history’ on pages 39–40 of this manual or in the *Applicant booklet* (for applicants to take with them)
- a photocopy of the ‘Application to become a foster carer’ form on pages 41–43 of this manual or in the *Assessment record*, including all necessary check information and consent forms. Currently in Victoria these include:
 - police record check (one for each member of household over 18 years old)
 - Working with Children Check (one for each applicant and in some circumstances one may be required for other members of household over 18 years of age)
 - authorisation to release medical information (sample on page 1 of the *Assessment resources*) (for signing by applicants only)
 - health checklist (Section 3.1 of the *Assessment record* (for completion by applicants only).

Important issues

Role of the experienced foster carer

The involvement of an experienced foster carer in this session enables the applicant(s) to get first-hand information about the caring task. It is important to ensure that following this session the foster carer is happy to deal with questions from the applicant(s) about practical issues involved in foster caring. If it is not possible for an experienced foster carer to be present at this session, some other arrangement should be made to put the applicant(s) in touch with a foster carer (for example, provide a foster carer’s contact details or have the applicant(s) participate in training where an experienced foster carer is part of the presentation team).

If necessary, the experienced foster carer could then be available during the second part of the session to assist the children to make a particular contribution to the *Information exchange session*.

All arrangements for payment of the foster carer to be present at the *Information exchange session* should be negotiated and finalised prior to the session.

Session organisation

During this initial session a large number of people may be present, but not all people will be involved in each activity. The session is divided into three parts.

The **first part**, covering practical details and community service organisation policy, involves all participants; however, quiet activities may be set up within view if there are younger children involved. Drawing, playdough, electronic games, a quiet video or television show can be helpful if children are restless.

The **second part** will involve two different activities:

- The adult applicant(s) and one of the assessors will focus on any further questions the applicant(s) may have and the explanation of the next steps to becoming a foster carer. This enables parents to have the opportunity to discuss sensitive family issues without children being present.
- (If applicable) The children and young people in the household and one of the assessors or the experienced foster carer will be involved in an activity about their family.

The **third part** involves all participants. If there are children or young people involved in this session, it is important to schedule the session so that it ends before the children or young people get too tired or hungry.

Engagement with applicant(s)

This first session is an opportunity to get to know the applicant(s) and to build rapport to encourage open sharing. Some applicants may feel resistant to the process of assessment because they are not confident expressing themselves verbally or are unused to sharing personal information. It can be appropriate to name this issue and to acknowledge that people may not feel initially comfortable. Assessors should ensure applicants understand:

- the purpose of each session
- the time the session is likely to take
- the commitment of the community service organisation to keep information provided throughout the interview process confidential, with the only exception being any material that raises concerns that a child or young person is at risk of harm.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the assessors to have some relaxed social interaction with the applicant(s) prior to moving into the first activity of the session.



Assessing suitability to foster

Stop signals

The purpose of the *Information exchange session* is not to assess applicant competency. At this stage, there has been no application to foster. All parties are in the process of establishing whether such an application is appropriate. That said, during the course of the *Information exchange session*, information may be provided that indicates that essential aspects of foster carer competency will not be met.

Such information may include:

- routine use of physical punishment with applicant's own children or young people which would be likely to continue with children or young people placed in their care
- one or more applicants being unwilling to ensure the house is smoke free
- negative attitudes towards families of children in care, which do not acknowledge the importance of continuing contact between children and young people in care and their family, and an unwillingness to explore other alternative views
- one or more applicants being unwilling to participate in the assessment process
- one or more applicants being unwilling to undergo background checks (for example, health, police and home and environment checks).

In the event of such a response, the assessors should raise the issue with the potential applicant(s) and indicate why their application, if submitted, would not be approved in those circumstances.

An invitation should be extended to further discuss the issue to ensure that potential applicants have all relevant information to reassess their practices or views.

Outline of Information exchange session

Part 1 (with all participants present)

1.1 Introduction (10 mins)

Introduce community service organisation workers

'I am [name]. I am responsible for assessing potential foster carers.

This is [name], s/he also assesses foster carers.

This is [name], s/he is a foster carer who works with our organisation.

S/he is here to answer any questions you may have at this stage about the practicalities of being a foster care family.'

Explain what will be happening at the session.

(Omit the final paragraph if there are no children or young people involved in this session.)

'This is the beginning of us working together to find out whether foster caring is a good option for you.

During this session, we get a **chance to exchange some information**. It's an opportunity for you to get some information about what fostering and this assessment process are all about. It's also an opportunity for us to get to know you, to find out a bit about your family background and to see how you relate together.

But don't worry – **we're not expecting everyone to be perfectly behaved!** Just having everyone together like this can be a bit unsettling and disruptive, so it's usual for people to be a bit tense. We are certainly not looking for perfect families. But we are looking for people who can give something to kids who need a lot of care.

We will be **taking some notes** as we talk to help to remind us of the material that's been covered. We are happy to show you any notes we have taken, so feel free to ask if you are interested.

(Note: In line with privacy principles, applicants will need to be made aware that information shared as part of the assessment process has the potential to be shared with the approval panel and will be stored within a community service organisation file. They should also be informed of those people at the community service organisation who will have access to this information.)

PRACTICE POINTS



Tip for assessor

Household description will be required in S11.3 Household profile in the *Assessment record* so keep a good record of this activity.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about who is in this household and how they relate to each other.

This session will be in three parts. The first part is the chance for us to go through the information in the pack that was sent out to you and to clarify any questions you have. In the second part we will split into two groups. The children and [name: the foster carer] will do some activities in one room, while the rest of us will talk a bit about your family background. Then we'll all get back together, and the kids will be able to show us what they have been doing.'

Activity

Go through the resource sheet IES.1, 'Overview of Information exchange session' (on page 38 of this manual and also on page 1 of the *Applicant booklet*). Check participants understand what will be happening in the session.

Encourage participants to ask questions or raise issues at any stage in the session.

1.2 Our household (20 minutes)

Provide instructions for drawing (optional)

'Draw a picture of your household (stick figures will do!). Make sure you include everyone who is in the household, including people who regularly stay overnight.'

Questions to discuss

- What are the names and ages of the household members and regular visitors?
- What relationship are they to each other?
- Say two things about each person on the paper (for example, their job or usual daily occupation and a positive contribution they make to the household).

1.3 Overview (information pack and policies) (15 minutes)

Activity

Ensure all participants have a copy of the *Foster care information pack*. (The applicants have been previously sent a copy of this.)

Go through the package briefly, highlighting information on:

- financial arrangements for foster carers
- assessment process (point out where this session fits in the process)
- the purpose of checks: health, police, Working with Children, Disqualified Register, home and environment, referees.

1.4 Response to information (20 minutes)

Explain the community service organisation's policy on health and hygiene and provide any written policy.

'The health and safety of children and young people in foster care, their foster carers and other household members is very important to our organisation. For this reason we have clear guidelines about health and hygiene practices in foster care homes. These guidelines include ways to ensure infections do not pass from person to person, such as using thin rubber gloves when changing nappies or dealing with soiled clothing or blood. These health precautions are to be used for all people in the household, not just the child or young person who is in foster care. Another guideline is that there should be no smoking inside the house. Our organisation provides foster carers with training in health and hygiene requirements.'

Questions to discuss

- Are you prepared to do training in health and hygiene practices?
- Do you think there will be any difficulties in your household in introducing requirements, such as wearing rubber gloves when dealing with cuts and scrapes or no smoking inside the house?

Explain the community service organisation's policy on discipline and provide any written policy

'We know that different families have different ways of disciplining their children. Children and young people who come into foster care have had very difficult experiences. This can include being physically hurt by their parents or other caregivers. It is very important that these children and young people are disciplined in ways that send a clear message to them that they are cared for in spite of their behaviour. Experience has shown that hitting or other physical punishment is not effective in dealing with these kids' behaviour, and it is not permitted in foster care. Our organisation has a behaviour management policy which guides foster carers on appropriate discipline of children and young people'.

Questions to discuss

- How often do you use physical punishment of any kind with your own children (or other children or young people you care for)?
- What difficulties would there be in your household in ensuring children and young people who you foster were not physically punished?

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about applicant's willingness to follow health and hygiene guidelines.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's attitude to physical punishment.

PRACTICE POINTS

Explain the community service organisation's policy on families of children and young people in care.

'It is sometimes difficult for people who are thinking about providing foster care to understand why we emphasise the need to support the relationship between the child or young person and his or her parents and family. It is important to understand how significant a child or young person's parents are to them even if they are unable to provide all the care their child needs.

Children and young people need to be reassured that their parents still care about them even when they are unable to be day-to-day caregivers.

A foster carer must understand they are looking after another family's child or young person and that family will continue be an important part of that child or young person's life. The child or young person may also have strong links with other foster families. All foster carers, including respite foster carers, need to support and build on those existing relationships.

These relationships are not necessarily easy. Children and young people can find aspects of their contact with their own family emotionally stressful and difficult.

However, experience has shown that foster carers' encouragement and support for children and young people to maintain positive and strong connections with their families helps those children and young people to develop their identity and healthy and happy relationships with others, including their foster carers.'

Questions to discuss

- What questions or concerns do you have about how contact with a child or young person's family would work?
- How do you think you will be able to support a child or young person's ongoing connection with their family?

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's attitudes to the families of children and young people in care.

Part 2 (with parents and children separate)

For this part of the session, invite the adults to stay in one room with one of the assessors, and the children and young people to go with the foster carer or other assessor to do a different activity. Inform everyone that it will be for approximately 15 minutes and the children and young people will have a chance to share what they were doing when they get back.

2a (For adult applicants)

2.1a Applicant's questions (10 minutes)

Activity

Invite questions about the process of becoming a foster carer.

Try to keep answers brief and to the point so that you do not run out of time for the second part of this session. The absence of children or young people allows the adult participants to raise issues that they may not feel comfortable discussing with their children present, particularly because they have not yet decided whether they wish to put in an application.

Provide contact details for the foster carer.

This is one way for the applicant(s) to talk further to an experienced foster carer about any practical details they want to know; however, it is important to stress that the foster carer will only deal with questions about the practicality of fostering. Let the potential applicant(s) know that questions they have about their suitability or the assessment process should be directed to the assessors.

2.2a Application to be a foster carer (5 minutes)

Activity

Provide the 'Application to be a foster carer' form (from pages 41–43 of this manual). Go through this form carefully and clearly highlight the conditions of the application which all applicants must sign.

Clearly explain which forms need to be signed by only those applying to be foster carers (the application, medical authorisation, health checklist) and those which have to be signed by all members of the household who are 18 years and older.

Encourage people to think about whether they want to make an application and explain that once an application has been lodged the assessment interviews will start.

PRACTICE POINTS

The image shows a thumbnail of a form titled '1.4 Application to become a Foster Carer'. The form is divided into several sections, including 'Personal Details', 'Health and Safety', and 'References'. It contains various fields for text entry, checkboxes, and a table for references. The form is presented in a simplified, schematic manner.

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the attitude of children towards having a foster child or young person in the family.

2.3a Task for next session (5 minutes)

Explain preparation of life history

'If you decide to put in an application to be a foster carer, we will want to hear something of your own personal life story. We need you to prepare something before the first assessment interview which sets out the major events in your life. We will also be discussing what has motivated you to apply to be a foster carer, so you may want to think about that.'

Activity

Give applicants a copy of the resource sheet IES.2, 'Preparing a life history' (found on pages 39–40 of this manual and also in the *Applicant booklet*), which includes the choices of completing a story, a tape or a line diagram.

2b (For children and young people)

2.1b Children and young people's perspective on their family

(20 minutes)

Activity

Ask children and young people to write or draw:

- 'My family'
- 'What another child or young person would like about living with our family'
- 'What is the most important question I have if a child or young person is fostered in my family?'

Tell older children that any written work doesn't have to be a great essay; dot points are fine.

Explain that the children and young people's work will be given to the assessors to take with them.

Have other activities available for the children and young people in case they finish before the adults.

Part 3 (with parents and children together)

3.1 Conclusion (10 minutes)

Activity

(If there are children and young people involved)

Explain that the adults have been discussing what happens next if they decide to find out more about whether the family is suitable to be foster carers.

Explain that the children and young people have been drawing or writing about their family.

Ask each child and young person to show what they have done.

Invite the children and young people to ask any questions they want to.

(For everyone)

Collect the family picture (and any stories or drawings done by the children and young people) to put in Section 11.2 'Family/household drawings' of the Assessment record.

Thank everyone for their contribution to the session.

PRACTICE POINTS

After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- Complete 'Outcomes of information exchange session' (Section 9.1 of the *Assessment record*).

Resource Sheet IES.1

Overview of Information exchange session

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is for applicants and assessors to exchange information about:

- the assessment process
- requirements of foster carers
- the applicant's household.

Topics to be covered

Part 1 – with everyone together

1. Introduction
2. Our household
3. Overview of information pack and policies
4. Response to information:
 - Community service organisation policy on health and hygiene
 - Community service organisation policy on discipline
 - Community service organisation policy on families of children and young people in care

Part 2

2a: With adult applicants only

- Applicant's questions
- Information on how to apply to be a foster carer and next steps

2b: With children and young people only (*if applicable*)

- Children and young people's perspective on their household

Part 3 – with everyone together

- Conclusion

Resource sheet IES.2
(page 1 of 2)

Preparing a life history

Each applicant is to complete a separate life history.

**There are different ways to prepare your life history.
Choose the one that suits you best.**

1. Life story

Write your life story by writing an answer to each of the questions below.

Ages 0–5

- When and where were you born? (if known)
- Who lived in your household?
- What was home like during this time?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?

Ages 5–12

- What was it like to live in your household at this time?
- What are some of your strong memories of this time?
- What was your experience of school like?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?

Ages 13–18

- What was it like living in your household during those years?
- What did you enjoy about school? What was difficult?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?

Adulthood

- Describe the significant relationships with partners you have had (length of time, reason for ending and so on).
- How important has education been in your life?
- What sort of work have you done? How important has work been in your life?
- What losses and traumas have you experienced in your life (for example, a home, job, relationship, infertility, person)?
- What other significant events have shaped your life?
- *If you have children:*
 - What have been the rewards and challenges of parenting?
 - Have you ever lived apart from your children? What was that like?

Resource Sheet IES.2 (page 2 of 2)

2. Life tape

Tape your story by recording an answer to each of the questions listed under '1. Life story'.

You can use a cassette player or a video recorder. Remember to keep each answer relatively brief; the tape should be no more than 20 minutes!

3. Life line

Get a long piece of paper (or join together several sheets with sticky tape) and mark:

- your birth date and place if known (at the beginning of the line)
- your current age (at the end of the line!)
- the houses you have lived in and the people who were in the household
- the schools and other educational institutions you went to
- any significant health issues
- start of significant relationships
- end of significant relationships
- birth of children (if applicable)
- significant losses and traumas (for example, a home, job, relationship, person, infertility)
- your jobs
- travel
- any other significant events in your life.

(If you would like to, you can use colours, drawings, pictures and so on to highlight significant events for you.)

1.4 Application to become a foster carer

Applicant to complete after participating in an Information exchange session

1.4.1 Personal details

	Applicant 1	Applicant 2 (if a couple)
Last name	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
First name	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Previous names	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Date of birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Aboriginal?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Torres Strait Islander?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Country of birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Occupation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
No. of employed hours a week	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Home address	<input type="text"/>	
Contact telephone	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Email address	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Date of arrival in Australia, if applicable	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

1.4.2 Referees

I/ we provide the following names and addresses of three responsible persons to act as referees to my/our application. These persons:

- are currently in contact with me/us
- have known me/us and my/our family for at least two years
- have observed me/us interacting with children or young people on a regular basis
- are not directly related to me/us
- are willing to provide a reference if required.

	Referee 1	Referee 2	Referee 3
Name	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Home address	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Home telephone	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Work telephone	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Mobile telephone	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

1.4.3 All other members of your household *(please include any people who regularly stay overnight)*

Name	Date of birth	Ethnicity	Relationship to you	Occupation

Are any of these individuals subject to a court order?

If **yes**, please provide details:

1.4.4 Do you have children residing away from home?

(Mark one) Yes No

If **yes**, please give the name, age and location of the child or young person and the reason why they are living elsewhere if under 18 years of age:

1.4.5 Do you speak a language other than English?

(Mark one) Yes No

If **yes**, please detail:

1.5.6 What previous experience do you have in caring for children or young people?**1.4.7a Do you have a current driver's license ?**

(Mark one) Yes No

1.4.7b Do you have a motor vehicle that is insured?

(Mark one) Yes No

Ability to drive is not essential, but may affect the type of placement considered.

1.4.8 Conditions of application

I/we apply to be foster carer(s) for
 (Name of community service organisation)

Please mark each box to indicate you have read and agreed and provided any attachments requested:

- I/we understand that I/we can withdraw the application at any stage. This will not prevent my/our re-application, but my/our reason(s) for withdrawal will be documented and discussed with me/us if I/we do re-apply.
- I/we have signed and attached:
 - police record check form*
 (This form is to give consent for background screening, including relevant criminal record). I/we understand that a criminal record does not automatically debar me/us from foster caring, but the implication of any convictions on my/our suitability to be a foster carer(s) will be discussed with me/us and will be taken into account in the assessment process.)
 - authorisation for release of medical information from my/our doctor.
- I/we have attached additional police record check forms, completed and signed by each member of our household who is 18 years of age or older.
- I/we have submitted the form(s) for a Working with Children Check and have attached the receipt(s).
- I/we understand additional Working with Children Checks^o may be required for each member of our household who is 18 years of age or older.
- I/we understand international police checks[#] will be undertaken, if applicable.
- I/we have attached my/our life history.
- I/we agree to take part in the process to assess foster carers for approval and I/we understand it will include interviews with any children or young people who are a part of my/our household.
- I/we understand that I/we will need to complete a training course prior to being approved as a foster carer.
- I/we understand that (name of community service organisation) will ask my/our permission to contact any other people or community service organisations who are able to provide relevant information about my/our suitability to provide foster care.
- I/we understand that (name of community service organisation) will check the register⁺ held by the Victorian Department of Human Services which records the names of people disqualified from caring.
- I/we state that the information contained in this application, including all attachments, is correct to the best of my/our knowledge.

	Applicant 1	Applicant 2 (if a couple)
Signed	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Name	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
Date	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

* The police record check and the Working with Children Check are a legal requirement in Victoria.
 o In certain circumstances a Working with Children Check is required for household members over 18 years. Applicants should clarify their circumstances with the community service organisation.
 # If applicant(s) has/have lived outside of the Australia in the past five years, consideration must be given to requesting a criminal record check from the country in which they previously lived. In these circumstances the applicant(s) should contact the relevant embassy and request this information.
 + The register is to be established following proclamation of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

Interview A: Demonstrate personal readiness to become a foster carer

Background information

Competency A

This interview provides the opportunity to gather evidence (for example, responses provided directly by the applicant(s) and relevant examples described by the applicant(s)) that the applicant(s) is/are competent in the area of Competency A. Evidence relating to other competencies may also arise in this interview and should be recorded.

Competency A: ‘Demonstrate personal readiness to become a foster carer’ covers the requirement to recognise and apply relevant personal experiences to the task of caring for children and young people in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
A1 Identify personal issues that may affect the decision to become a foster carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies motivation to become a foster carer, which includes a focus on the needs of children and young people in foster care b. Identifies in own life history experiences that may have impacted on emotional stability, resilience and the ability to deal with stress c. Identifies quality of relationships within family of origin d. <i>(If applicable)</i> Identifies issues relating to own children that may be relevant to the decision to become a foster carer
A2 Reflect on experience, capacity and readiness to become a foster carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Demonstrates that own experiences of grief and loss will not impede the provision of appropriate support to a child or young person in foster care b. Identifies a range of enduring emotional attachments c. <i>(If applicable)</i> Identifies a process of resolution of issues associated with infertility which will ensure the applicant can focus on the needs of a child or young person in care d. Demonstrates ability to deal with stress constructively
A3 Determine the course of action to be followed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Applies relevant information, including needs of children and young people in care and any risk to self and family, to determine capacity to become a foster carer b. Identifies areas of concern and workable strategies to address them c. Describes realistic commitment to upgrading skills and knowledge

Relevant research and practice experiences for Interview A

Important information

The challenge of preparing a tool to assist with the assessment of potential foster carers is to combine the strengths of the task-centred competency approach with strengths drawn from the psychodynamic approach to foster care assessment, which focuses on process and relationships. This is important if applicants and caseworkers are to engage in a dynamic creative process, which will enable them to gain insight into:

- applicants' motivation, attitudes, values and beliefs
- a clear understanding of the skills that applicants have to offer.

Competency A: 'Demonstrate personal readiness to become a foster carer' reflects the importance of striking a balance between task-centred, skills auditing approaches and the valuing of insight and self-awareness of applicants.

The following research and practice findings* inform the assessment of Competency A.

Personal qualities of effective foster carers are:

- enthusiasm and realism (Ray & Horner 1990, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- resourcefulness and ability to persevere (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- ability to retain hope and have a sense of humour (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and needs (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Dare 1984, as reported in Tucker 2000)
- if childless, an ability to accept the pain associated with this (Dando & Minty 1987, as reported in Tucker 2000)
- motivation to do respite care through a mixture of convenience and altruism (Bradley & Aldgate 1994, as reported in Tucker 2000)
- motivation to do long term care though either:
 - a strong desire for a child or young person, but an unwillingness or inability to conceive
 - strong identification with deprived or unhappy children because of own childhood experiences (Kay 1966; Dando & Minty 1987, as reported in Tucker 2000)
- good physical and emotional health, including a positive self-esteem (practice wisdom)
- involvement in a support network of friends and family which is solid and supportive (practice wisdom)
- participation in a well functioning family or household (including with dependent children) which supports the decision to foster (practice wisdom).

Outcomes for children and young people are likely to be poorer if foster carers:

- exhibit possessiveness towards the foster child or young person (Sanchirico et al. 1998, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- feel insecure, disappointed by people they trust, or feel that people hurt them and that circumstances are against them (Jordan & Rodway 1978, as reported in Tucker 2000).

* This material is drawn from the *Background paper*, which is included in the *Step by step Victoria* package.

Assessing Competency A

Proceed with caution



Stop signals



During the course of Interview A, an applicant may give responses that indicate that they are not yet competent in the area of ‘demonstrating personal readiness to be a foster carer’. These responses indicate that they will not be able to appropriately apply their relevant personal experiences to the task of caring for a child or young person in care.

Such responses may include:

- The motivation of the applicant to become a foster carer does not include a consideration of the needs of the child or young person in care, but is predominately focused on meeting the needs of the applicant.
- The applicant expresses a pattern of ‘compulsive’ caring (for example, eagerness to care for large numbers of children or young people, including children or young people with high needs, without recognising the impact of this on quality of care provided or the impact on the foster carer’s own children and family).
- The applicant does not recognise that parenting one’s own child is different from caring for a child or young person from another family.
- The applicant has not developed any long term satisfying emotional relationships (may describe ongoing and entrenched patterns of estrangement within family and other support networks, or relationships that lack emotional depth).
- The applicant cannot demonstrate significant capacity for empathy or capacity to see other’s needs.
- The applicant’s life is dominated by significant levels of unaddressed grief or stress (or denial of grief when it would be an appropriate response).
- The applicant holds rigid attitudes and does not value differences in others.

In the event of such a response, or any other concerns by the assessors that the applicant has provided evidence that they are not or may not be competent to undertake the task of caring, the assessor should follow the steps as set out on page 16 of this manual. This may involve exploring the issue in more depth to make an informed decision about the applicant’s competence.

Preparing for Interview A

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- applicant(s).

Location

This session is held face-to-face, either at the home of the applicant(s) or the community service organisation.

Length of session

This session will take two to three hours. (This will vary depending on circumstances; for example, the number of applicants, whether there are children living in the household, whether infertility is an issue and so on.)

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide opportunities to explore the ability of the applicant(s) to draw on and appropriately apply personal experiences in dealing with the tasks of foster caring. It will cover:

- motivation to become a foster carer
- the nature and significance of family relationships in the applicant's life
- response of applicant(s) to loss and grief
- response of applicant(s) to change and stress
- (if applicable) the impact of fostering on applicant's own children
- (if applicable) dealing with infertility.

Material required

- *Applicant booklet* (containing Resource Sheet A.1, 'Overview of interview A' and Resource Sheet A.2, 'What motivates foster carers?', also found on pages 61 and 62 of this manual)
- a photocopy of Resource Sheet A.3, 'Interview A: follow-up checklist' for each applicant found on page 63 of this manual and also in the *Applicant booklet*
- large sheet of paper and marker pens (to draw a kinship diagram)
- photolanguage set – a set of evocative pictures and images (optional, see page 52 of this manual for more information about photolanguage set)
- bear cards (optional, see page 52 of this manual for more information about bear cards)
- strength cards (optional, see page 52 of this manual for more information about strength cards).

Important issues

Feedback from checks

Ensure all the paperwork for checks has been completed (unless it is the community service organisation's policy to do this after Interview A):

- police record check
- Working with Children Check
- check of Disqualified Register at Department of Human Services
- medical questionnaire sent to doctor with covering letter and a copy of the health checklist completed by applicant
- health checklist (completed by applicant) attached to assessment record
- three referees contacted and asked to complete personal reference forms.

Ensure applicant(s) has/have an opportunity to comment on any concerns raised.

Cultural, class and gender differences

This interview explores many aspects of the applicant's experience and personal responses. Assessors must take into consideration elements such as culture, class and gender which may impact on the way an applicant has dealt with issues in their life.

Ideally, there should be at least one assessor from the same cultural background as the applicant. If this is not possible, it is critical that the assessors seek advice about the applicant's culture and its norms. This is particularly important in ensuring cultural biases do not hinder the assessors' capacity to appreciate the information provided by the applicant.

Gender and class bias need to be considered. For example, assessors who are female and tertiary educated may have different communication patterns and norms from people with less formal education. It is important that assessors explore with applicants the meaning of comments or actions that at face value may not appear to be appropriate responses. One example is an applicant who is very matter of fact and brief when describing personal information. Rather than immediately interpreting this response as indicating emotional limitations, assessors will need to acknowledge that different people communicate differently and to focus on the ability of the applicant to understand the impact of their personal experiences on their life.

An example where assessor bias can impact on assessment is in the area of grief and loss. Issues that may arise include:

- different approaches to grieving by men and women
- the experience of Aboriginal applicants who often are part of communities that have known multiple, continuous and intergenerational losses. The extent of loss experienced by Aboriginal applicants may make their grieving process a complex one, requiring an understanding of the stolen generations, the impact of the welfare and justice systems on Aboriginal communities, and Indigenous health status and life expectancy issues in relation to the broader Australian community
- understanding of loss from different religious perspectives (for example, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist faiths each approach death within a different framework).

Such differences must be appreciated if the assessment process is to accurately capture the ability of an applicant to undertake the task of caring.

A key component of good practice in recognising and challenging one's own assumptions is to retain an approach of respectful curiosity when gathering information. It is appropriate to ask questions to understand more about the context which may have shaped the applicant's responses.

Preparing a kinship diagram

A kinship diagram is a tool to map out family and other significant relationships across generations.

Assessors need to engage in the process of preparing such a diagram with genuine respect and an attitude of curiosity. This assists in creating a climate in which applicants feel safe and comfortable to explore significant issues.

Preparing a kinship diagram and the subsequent discussions with the applicant(s) may generate family stories that give meaning to or 'explain' how the family views itself and particular events or people. Examples of this might be:

- 'We are a family that sticks together through thick and thin.'
- 'We don't take charity.'
- 'My grandparents were always suspicious of outsiders.'

It is important to allow the applicant(s) to share the stories and interpret them themselves.

The assessors should not undertake further interpretation without this being shared with the applicant(s) to check whether it fits their understanding. People's lives are complex and should not be reduced to simplistic or limiting labels; however, assessors should ask the applicant(s) questions about how they think their family and family history will affect their attitudes and behaviour towards caring for children or young people from another family and building relationships with those families.

Life history

The assessors should prepare for this session by carefully reading or listening to the life history material provided by the applicant(s). This material should have been sent with the 'Application to be a foster carer' form, and the assessors should not schedule Interview A until they have received the life history.

Note any issues in the life history that need to be further explored. This may include obvious gaps, omissions or apparent contradictions in the history.

Session variations

Two sections within this session will only apply to some applicants.

- Section 5 ('Impact on foster carer's other children') only applies to applicants who have children.
- Section 6 ('Fertility') only applies to applicants who would have liked to have had a child of their own (or another child of their own) but are unable to do so because of their circumstances (for example, infertility, lack of suitable partner, age and so on).

The length of this session will increase if there is more than one applicant.

The session covers a range of personal information that should be explored with each applicant. The material can be covered with both applicants present and taking it in turns to respond.

The activities for applicants include options to use some tools to stimulate responses from applicants. Such tools can be a very helpful way of opening up discussion, especially for applicants who are less confident or comfortable expressing feelings verbally.

The options include using:

- photolanguage: a set of pictures that evoke a wide range of moods and responses. (If you don't have a readymade set, you can collect interesting pictures from postcards, magazines, calendars and so on)
- bear cards: a collection of 48 characters, each on a colourful card, revealing different personalities and demonstrating different feelings
- strength cards: a set of pictures that offer rich interpretive metaphors which can act as 'tipping points' for reflection.

For details of these and other resources go to the web site of St Luke's Innovative Resources <www.stlukes.org.au>.

Outline of Interview A

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Activity

Check whether applicant(s) has/have any questions or concerns that the *Information exchange session* raised.

If **information from checks** (medical, referee, police, Working with Children, register) has raised concerns about an applicant's suitability, make sure the topic is addressed with the applicant(s).

Ask how the applicant(s) found the experience of preparing their life history. (Let them know that you will look at that together later in this session.)

Go through Resource Sheet A.1, 'Overview of Interview A' (on page 61 of this manual and also on page 4 of the *Applicant booklet*). Reinforce that the interview is not like an exam with right and wrong answers. It will be an opportunity to explore some issues that can impact on the way people provide care for children and young people. Applicants should feel free at any time to ask questions to help them to clarify issues, including to check how the topic being discussed relates to providing care for children and young people.

2. Motivation to become a foster carer (10 minutes)

Activity

Look at Resource Sheet A.2, 'What motivates foster carers?' (found on page 62 of this manual and also on page 5 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Ask the applicant(s) to choose two to three reasons that come closest to their motivation to foster. (If none apply, they can use the 'other' category).

Questions to discuss

- What reasons did you pick?
- When did you first start to think about fostering and why?
- If for any reason you are not able to foster a child or young person, are there other ways you could direct your motivation?

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about applicant's motivation to be a foster carer (Competency A1 a).

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessors

For applicants who are in a couple, the next interview provides the opportunity to further explore any relationship issues that arise during Interview A.

Tip for assessor

Information may provide evidence about whether the applicant can identify relevant experiences in their own life history (Competency A1b, A1c, A2b).

3. Kinship diagram (30 minutes)

Explain a kinship diagram.

‘What we are going to do now is to work on a kinship diagram. This is a type of family tree that gives details of who is in your family and other significant people to you. It will help us to get a picture of your family background and relationships.

Most people enjoy doing this diagram and find this interesting; however, it can bring back strong memories so it’s important to take time and not hurry the process.

If doing this diagram does trigger unhappy or sad memories that are difficult to deal with, let us know so we can discuss them and see whether they have any impact on your decision about fostering.’

Activity

Provide a large sheet of paper and coloured marker pens.

Draw up the kinship diagram.

(You can use the following steps. Ensure you have obtained enough detail to complete a genogram for the Approval panel report in Section 10.1.5 of the Assessment record.)

- Write the names of the applicant(s) in the centre of the paper. If applicable, show the year of marriage (or establishment of their partnership) by drawing a line connecting the two names with the year on it.
- Add any children born to applicant(s) (put names and ages) including any miscarriages, still births or deaths.
- If the applicant(s) has/have had significant previous partnerships, add them and any children (and grandchildren) of those relationships.
- Put in details of parents (or caregivers), grandparents and siblings of the applicant(s).
- Complete the diagram by asking the applicant(s) to add in any other very significant people to them (for example, uncles, aunts, cousins, very close and long standing family friends).

Questions to discuss

- Name three people on the diagram you feel very close to. Describe them in three to four words and explain why you feel close to them.
- Name three people on the diagram you feel most distant from. Describe them in three to four words and explain why you feel distant from them.
- Who have you had tension with:
 - in the past? Why?
 - recently? Why?
- What are some of the strengths of your family?
- What are some words or phrases that describe or sum up your family?

4. Life history

4a Attachment issues (20 minutes)

Explain relevance of life histories

‘The experiences we have during our own childhood and growing up, and the way we deal with those experiences, can affect how we respond to children or young people we care for. We will now be looking at some particular areas of your life history and how they may affect the way you as a foster carer would look after a child or young person dealing with those sorts of issues themselves.’

Activity

Ask the applicant(s) to go through the life history material they have prepared.

Explain that you are interested in the applicant’s connections and attachments to others when they were growing up.

Questions to discuss

- What was it like for you growing up in your family?

‘Think of a time when you were growing up when you felt really good or happy.’

- What made it a good or happy time?
- What part did adults play in that memory?

‘Think of a difficult or unhappy time in your family when you were growing up.’

- What was happening?
- Who noticed what you were feeling?

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence about the applicant’s emotional attachments within the wider family network (Competency A1c, A2b).

Tip for assessors

If you are getting the life history of two applicants, this activity may take extra time. Information from this activity will be needed when filling out the ‘Household profile’ in S 11.3 of the *Assessment record* so keep a good note of details provided.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence about the applicant’s ability to identify the impact of their childhood experiences on their ability to care for children or young people (Competency A1b, A1c, A2b).

PRACTICE POINTS

- Did anyone look after you?
If yes:
 - Who was this? What did they do or how did they behave that made a difference to you?
- If no:
 - What do you think someone could have said or done that would have made a difference for you?
- Who did you turn to when you needed help or comfort as a child?
- What have you learnt about relationships through your own experience as a child that would affect how you may care for a foster child or young person?

4b Grief and loss (20 minutes)

Explain the relevance of separation and grief.

‘Grief and loss are often important issues for children and young people in foster care to deal with. We are interested in how you deal with those issues yourself. Think of a time when you experienced separation or grief. It may not be a dramatic issue such as the death of a family member, but it should be something that was significant to you.’

Questions to discuss

- What was the separation or grief you experienced?
- What feelings do you remember from that time?
- How did you behave? (Were you outwardly the same or was there something different to your usual pattern?)
- Did you have a physical reaction to the situation?
- Who or what helped you at that time or what were you wishing for?
- How has that experience continued to impact on you?
- Did the situation produce any positive outcomes for you?
- What other situations of loss and grief have you experienced? Did you have similar reactions?
- Is there grief that is significant in your life at the moment? How is it affecting you?
- How do you think your own experiences of grief and loss may affect the way you deal with the experiences of children or young people in care who are often experiencing considerable loss and grief?

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's understanding of how grief affects them and how they may relate to a foster child or young person in grief (Competency A1b, A2a).

4c Response to change and stress (20 minutes)

Explain the importance of change and stress.

‘Fostering often involves dealing with change and stress. Think of a time in your life when you faced a crisis, trauma or other challenging change in your circumstances.’

Questions to discuss

- How did you deal with the stress?
- What did the experience teach you about your strengths and needs?
- What support did you receive at the time?
- How does stress affect your consumption of cigarettes, alcohol or other drugs or other patterns of behaviour, such as gambling?
- What professional help have you considered to deal with stress or trauma (for example, a counsellor, your doctor)?
- Is there stress that is significant in your life at the moment? How is it affecting you?
- Caring for children or young people in foster care is a big change and can bring with it considerable stress and challenges. How do you see yourself coping with that change and stress?

5. Impact of fostering on foster carer’s own children (20 minutes)

(only if applicant has children living at home)

Questions to discuss

- When did you first tell your children about your interest in fostering?
- What did you say to them?
- What were the responses of each of your children?
(or pick some cards from the bear cards pack that show how your children responded)
- Was that how you expected them to respond?
- What responses did your children have to the *Information exchange session* in which they were involved?
- If you do have a child or young person in foster care placed with you, how might that impact on each family member? *(Deal with each household member in turn, including each applicant.)*
- How do you expect your children will react to having another child or young person in the family who will require a lot of attention from you?
(or pick some cards from the bear cards pack that show how your children might react to having another child or young person in the family who will require a lot of attention from you)
- How will you know whether the fostering arrangement is not working out for your family and you should stop fostering?

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence that the applicant can recognise and deal with stress constructively (Competency A2d).

Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence about whether the applicant is realistic about the impact of fostering on their own children (Competency A1d, A3a).

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessor

Some applicants may have raised issues about fertility in the previous discussions around grief or stress so you may not need to ask the following questions, but you will still need to explain why we ask about fertility.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't already have evidence about how the applicant has resolved issues of fertility (Competency A2c).

6. Fertility

Question for each applicant

- Would you have liked to have had a child of your own (or another child of your own)?

(If no, go to 7 'Conclusion'. If yes, complete 6.)

Explain the reason for asking questions about fertility.

'Fostering a child or young person often raises issues for people who have tried but have not been able to have a child when they wished to. Your experience in this area is important for us to explore.'

Question for each applicant

- Have you been trying to have a child but not been able to conceive or give birth?

(If no, go on to 6b 'Hopes for own children'. If yes, continue to 6a 'Infertility'.)

6a Infertility (30 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- How long have you been having difficulty in conceiving?
- What programs have you been involved in to try to conceive a child?
- Are you still involved in any fertility programs or treatment?
- (If no) How did you come to a decision to stop?
- If you are not able to foster, what hopes or goals would your life then hold?

Activity

(Each applicant should do this exercise separately before discussing the questions.)

Option A (provide pen and paper)

Ask each applicant to draw a picture or diagram that shows their responses from when they first realised they were experiencing infertility difficulties to this point in time.

Ask each applicant to share their drawing.

OR Option B (provide a set of evocative photos or images)

Ask each applicant to pick pictures that remind them of their reactions:

- when they first realised they were experiencing fertility problems
- when they hit a low point in dealing with this issue
- now.

Ask each applicant to share their pictures and why they chose them.

Questions to discuss

(with each partner to give their own response)

- How have you coped when significant people in your life (for example, sisters, good friends) have got pregnant and had children?
- What has been the positive and negative impact of your infertility on your relationship with your partner?
- A foster child or young person comes with their own family history. You will not be able to recognise your own family traits in the foster child or young person as you would if they were your own child. What adjustments would you need to make to care well for a foster child or young person?
- How could the knowledge that you can't have a child of your own affect the way you might respond to the parents of a foster child in your care?

(Go on to 8 'Conclusion'.)

6b. Hopes for own children (15 minutes)**Questions to discuss**

- What factors have prevented you from having your own child?
- What would happen to your foster care application if those circumstances changed?
- If you did foster a child or young person, how may your hopes and dreams about a child of your own affect the way you cared for a child or young person?
- What issues would you have to deal with if, after a child or young person was placed with you, you were able to have your own child?

PRACTICE POINTS

PRACTICE POINTS

7. **Conclusion** (5 minutes)**Activity**

Self-evaluation checklist. Provide each applicant with a copy of Resource Sheet A.3 'Interview A: Follow-up checklist' (photocopied from page 63 of this manual) to take away with them to consider and bring back to the next session.

Next session. Explain to applicant(s) that the next session will start with an opportunity to:

- Review how the process is going for everyone.
- Look at issues about working as a team with others. This will include looking at relationship issues with partners (if applicable).
- Discuss the importance of helping children and young people in care to develop their own identity.

(If applicants are a couple)

Explain reason for speaking to applicants separately in the next session.

'Part of this session will be looking at how you relate as a couple. For one exercise we will be talking to each of you separately to make sure we hear both your perspectives on your relationship.'

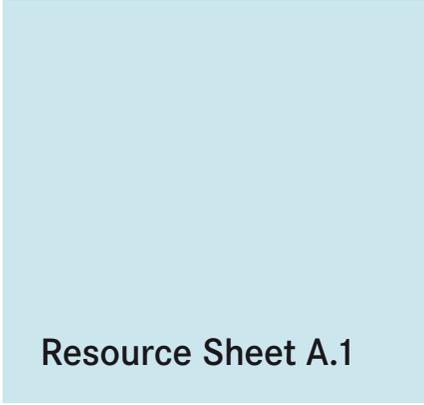
After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- complete 'Evidence of Competency A' (Section 10.2 of the *Assessment record*)

Note that it is not possible to finalise the evidence about the final element of Competency A at this stage of the assessment process.

- add any relevant information to evidence of competencies B, C or D (Sections 10.3, 10.4 and 10.5 of the *Assessment record*)
- complete a genogram for inclusion in the Summary report and recommendations (Section 10.1.5 of the *Assessment record*)
- if applicants withdraw application at any stage, ask for the reasons and record these in the 'Withdrawal of application' (Section 2 of the *Assessment record*)
- if the community service organisation decides not to proceed with the assessment, convey (verbally and in writing) the reasons for this decision to the applicant(s). A copy of the letter must be attached to Section 2 of the *Assessment record*.

**Resource Sheet A.1**

Overview of Interview A

Purpose of interview

The purpose of this session is to explore the applicant's ability to draw on and apply appropriately their personal experiences in dealing with the tasks of foster caring.

Topics to be covered

1. Introduction
2. Motivation to become a foster carer
3. Kinship diagram
4. Life history:
 - a. Family attachments
 - b. Grief and loss
 - c. Response to change and stress
5. Impact on foster carer's own children (if applicable)
6. Fertility
 - a. Infertility (if applicable)
 - b. Hopes for own children (if applicable)
7. Conclusion

Resource Sheet A.2**What motivates foster carers?**

1. 'I've had a good life, I want to give something back.'
2. 'I can't have a child of my own at this time.'
3. 'Every child has a right to a home and to be loved. I can do that.'
4. 'Some parents are doing it tough out there. I want to help them and their children.'
5. 'I love kids; my life seems empty without them.'
6. 'My child would love a playmate.'
7. 'It seems a great way to work from home; I really need a little extra income.'
8. 'I want to give a child the chance of a brand new start.'
9. 'I had a difficult childhood. I know what some kids go through and I want to help them.'
10. 'I want to have fun with a kid, planning and going to lots of places and excursions with them.'
11. Other _____

Resource Sheet A.3

Interview A: follow-up checklist

One of the key qualities of foster carers is having the ability to appropriately draw on and apply their personal experiences in dealing with the tasks of foster caring.

1. My motivations for wanting to be a foster carer would help me to focus on the needs of a child or young person in my care, not just my own needs.

YES/NO

2. The relationships I have had in my life, including my own childhood experience, would assist me to offer a secure relationship to a child or young person in foster care.

YES/NO

3. My experiences of loss and grief would help me to understand and appropriately deal with the loss and grief experienced by a child or young person in foster care.

YES/NO

4. I am able to deal constructively with stress and seek appropriate support.

YES/NO

5. I recognise that as a foster carer I will be caring for someone else's child or young person and that it will not be the same experience as having my own child.

YES/NO

6. Other comments: _____

Interview B:

Work effectively as part of a team

Background information

Competency B

This interview provides the opportunity to gather evidence (for example, responses provided directly by the applicant(s) and relevant examples described by the applicant(s)) that the applicant(s) is/are competent in the area of Competency B. Evidence that relates to other competencies may also arise in this interview and should be recorded.

Competency B ‘Work effectively as part of a team’ covers the requirement to operate and communicate collaboratively with personal networks, community service organisation staff, families of children and young people and other key people involved in the Looking After Children care and placement plan and the statutory case plan for the child or young person in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
B1 Network effectively with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies sources of personal and emotional support that will enable them to focus on the needs of a child or young person in foster care b. Identifies the potential impact of foster caring on their existing support networks c. Describes potentially positive outcomes of working as a team within foster care
B2 Establish a positive relationship with family members of child or young person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies strategies to promote ongoing contact between a child or young person in foster care, their family and other people with whom they have significant relationships b. Describes ways of managing communication and conflict effectively to keep opportunities open for a positive relationship between the child or young person in foster care and their family
B3 Communicate appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Communicates clearly b. Seeks clarification when required c. Uses skills of assertive communication when appropriate d. Describes strategies to resolve conflict and misunderstandings

Relevant research and practice experiences for Interview B

The following research and practice findings* inform the assessment of Competency B: 'Work effectively as part of a team.'

A personal quality of an effective foster carer is involvement with a support network of friends and family which is solid and supportive (practice wisdom).

Knowledge of and relationship with children exhibited by effective foster carers includes a commitment to children and young people participating in decision making (practice wisdom supported by the principles which underpin the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*).

Skills and values of effective foster carers are:

- ability to negotiate change well (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- willingness to learn and an ability to use support and work as part of a team (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Sellick & Thorburn 1996, as reported in Barker 1999)
- ability to make logical decisions (Ray & Horner 1990, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- ability to deal with conflict constructively (practice wisdom)
- effective advocacy on behalf of children (practice wisdom)
- valuing of difference and diversity (practice wisdom also supported by the principles which underpin the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*).

Outcomes for children are likely to be poorer if foster carers avoid contact with outsiders (Frances 1992, as reported in Tucker 2000).

Important note: Frances reviewed families in which sexual abuse had occurred in order to identify implications for assessment of foster carers. Frances could identify no clear-cut predictors, but did identify families that avoid interaction with outsiders and have minimal communication within the family as concerning. Frances cautioned that this information could only be used as broad guidance in making an assessment.

* This material is drawn from the *Background paper*, which is included in the *Step by step Victoria package*.

Assessing Competency B

Proceed with caution



Stop signals



During the course of Interview B, an applicant may give responses that indicate that they are not yet competent in the area of working effectively as part of a team. These responses indicate that they are not able to operate and communicate collaboratively with their own personal network, community service organisation staff, families of children or young people in care and other key people involved in the case plan for a child or young person in care.

Such responses may include:

- *(For applicants who have a partner)* The applicants' relationship is characterised by emotional distance, lack of affection or support, resentment, unresolved conflict or lack of communication which would prevent them working as a unit in caring for a child or young person.
- Conflict within family can involve violence.
- The applicant does not have networks in place that could provide support during the stresses of fostering.
- The applicant is unwilling to work cooperatively with others.
- The applicant does not recognise the significance of the families of children or young people or support their inclusion in a foster child or young person's life.
- The applicant does not value diversity or the contribution of those from other cultures and backgrounds.

In the event of such a response, or any other concerns by the assessors that the applicant has provided evidence that they are not or may not be competent to undertake the task of foster caring, the assessors should follow the steps as set out on page 16 of this manual. This may involve exploring the issue in more depth to make an informed decision about the applicant's competence.

Preparing for Interview B

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- applicant(s). (This should include the partner of the applicant if he or she will have a role in caring for a child or young person in foster care, even if he or she is not a resident of the household.)

Location

This session is held face-to-face, either at the family home or at the community service organisation.

Length of session

This session will take approximately one hour. (Allow an additional one-and-a-half hours if the applicant has a partner or the applicants are a couple.)

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide opportunities to explore the applicant's ability to work as a team with others, including support networks and community service organisation staff. It will cover:

- the personal and emotional support available to the applicants as individuals and within their relationships
- dealing with conflict
- local networks of support
- working as part of a community service organisation team.

Material required

- *Applicant booklet* (including Resource Sheets B.1 'Overview of Interview B' and B.2 'Jim and Kay's story' which are also found on pages 77–79 of this manual)
- a photocopy of Resource Sheet B.3 'Interview B: follow-up checklist' for applicant(s) to take with them (from page 79 of this manual and also in the *Applicant booklet*)
- A3 sheets of blank paper and a selection of different coloured marker pens (for ecogram)
- bear cards (optional, see information on page 52 of this manual regarding bear cards).

Important issues

Feedback from checks

Ensure all the paperwork for outstanding checks has been completed and is returned (unless it is the community service organisation's policy to do this after interview):

- health checklist (completed by applicant)
- medical questionnaire (completed by doctor)
- Working with Children Check
- police records check
- check of Disqualified Register at Department of Human Services
- three personal references .

Ensure applicant(s) has/have an opportunity to comment on any concerns raised.

Review of assessment

This session provides the opportunity for the assessors and applicants to 'swap notes' about the assessment process. In particular, there is the opportunity for a comparison of the evaluation sheets independently completed by the assessor and each applicant following the previous interview.

The assessor should carefully prepare for this process by:

- carefully completing 'Evidence of Competency A' (Section 10.2 of *Assessment record*)
- making a considered interim assessment recommendation (Section 10.2.5 of *Assessment record*)
- preparing how to respectfully and honestly share this information with the applicant, particularly if the recommendation is that the assessment be terminated or suspended for further work.

If there is little or no congruence between the 'Evidence of Competency A' prepared by the assessor and the 'Interview A: follow-up checklist' prepared by each applicant it is important that this be explored. At this stage it is not appropriate to proceed with the rest of Interview B if in their assessment the assessor has highlighted concerns to be dealt with prior to the resumption of the assessment process.

On the other hand, it is very common for a self-assessment to be more negative than an assessment done by an objective observer. In this case, it may be that the assessor is happy to proceed, but the applicant has indicated they have concerns. It is important to clarify the basis of these concerns; for example:

- Is the applicant not sure of the standard required?
- Is the problem lack of confidence, rather than lack of competence?

Often when the applicant knows that the assessors are satisfied that the assessment can proceed, the applicant is happy to continue; however, the assessors must respect any marked resistance to continue by the applicant. Applicants have the right to withdraw at any time in the process. The reasons for this should be recorded in Section 2 of the *Assessment record* under 'Withdrawal of application'.

Separate interviews

Because part of this session is focusing on the strength of the applicants' relationship, it is appropriate to individually ask each applicant in the relationship about their relationship. This is necessary to ensure each partner's perspective is clearly heard without one applicant dominating. This means the first exercise is repeated with each partner separately. (One partner can be told to arrive approximately 40 minutes after the other, if that is convenient.) There will be an opportunity at the beginning of Interview C for assessors to raise any issues that arise for them as a result of these separate interviews.

Gender, class and cultural bias

Assessors must be aware of making judgments that may involve assumptions relating to gender, class and culture. This session includes a focus on relationship issues. There are many different ways of expressing and describing relationships. For example, the way a man and a woman relate to each other as a couple in public will be greatly influenced by their cultural experiences and understandings. It is important that assessors find out about the issues that may impact on behaviour before interpreting the behaviour through their own cultural experiences.

Outline of Interview B

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Activity

Provide Resource Sheet B.1 ‘Overview of Interview B’ (on page 77 of this manual and also on page 7 of the *Applicant booklet*) and ensure participants are aware of the session program.

2. Review of assessment process (15 minutes)

Explain purpose of review

‘This first part of the interview gives us a chance to check out how we are finding the assessment process.’

Activity

If information from checks (medical, referee, police, Working with Children, register) has raised concerns about an applicant’s suitability, make sure the topic is addressed with the applicant(s).

Share with the applicant(s) your interim assessment recommendation made after the previous session.

Discuss the ‘Interview A: follow-up checklist’ completed by the applicant(s) after the previous session.

Discuss any marked differences in the applicant’s self-assessment and your own.

If you or the applicant(s) have decided to terminate or put the assessment process on hold, ensure there is a clear understanding and recording of:

- the reason for that decision
- feedback from the applicant(s) about the assessment process
- any next steps to be taken.

The community service organisation should provide information (including information about the appeals process) verbally and in writing to the applicant(s) if the organisation has decided not to proceed with the assessment.

Questions to discuss

(if it is decided to continue with the assessment process)

- How are you finding the assessment process so far?
- What part of the process has had the most impact on you so far?
- What issues or concerns have been raised for you that you have found difficult to deal with?

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence about the applicant’s ability to recognise areas of concern about their readiness (Competency A3b).

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessor

This activity provides a way of dealing with issues that may have come up in the life history activity in the last interview.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence that the applicants' partnership is a source of personal and emotional support and that they understand the impact of fostering on it (Competency B1a, B1b).

Activity

Highlight progress of the assessment process to date using a copy of the Steps to becoming a foster carer flowchart from page 8 of the *Foster care information pack* or page 4 of this manual.

Explain purpose of interview

'The rest of this interview will be looking at working as a team with others. Team work starts at the personal level, with the support we get from others, such as our partner and our friends.'

3. Team work with partner (a total of 90 minutes for two separate interviews of 45 minutes each)

(This section of the interview only applies if applicants are a couple or if the applicant has a partner who will be involved in the care of the child or young person.)

Questions to discuss

(to be discussed with each partner individually)

- What initially brought you together as a couple?
- What makes your relationship work?
- What are your partner's strengths?
- What are the issues you need to work on as a couple?
- How do you make decisions as a couple?
- How does your partner know you care about him or her?
- How do you know how your partner feels about things?
- Describe a typical situation of conflict you have with your partner:
(Bear cards can be used to assist applicants to describe conflict patterns.)
 - How does the conflict start?
 - How do each of you behave?
 - How does it end?
 - Is there ever any violence in your conflict?
- Do finances ever cause conflict in your family? If yes, how will you cope with the increased demands on your finances if you care for a foster child or young person?
- When you have difficulties in your relationship, who do you talk to about it?
- Have you ever separated from your partner? If yes, describe the process of getting back together.
- Have you ever sought professional help for your relationship?
- Under what circumstances might you consider seeking such help?
- What adjustments might you have to make to keep your relationship on track if you take on the role of foster carer?

- Are there any issues about fostering that you have not wanted to raise with us when your partner is present? If yes, what are they?
- *For same-sex couples or individuals who identify as homosexual:*
 - What issues might the fact that you are a same-sex couple raise for a child or young person in your care?
 - What has been your experience in demonstrating your homosexuality?
 - How has it affected your life?
 - How comfortable do you feel in your sexual orientation?
 - How have family and friends reacted to your homosexuality?
 - How do you think you will relate to birth parents and others involved in the child or young person's life?
 - What explanations (if any) will you give about your relationship?
 - How could you help a child or young person who may experience prejudice because of your (their foster carer's) sexual orientation?

4. **Dealing with conflict** (20 minutes)

Introduce topic of conflict.

'Different people deal with conflict in different ways. We all have our own pattern of coping with tensions and disagreements with other people. Describe a time when you were in significant conflict with another person (other than your partner).'

Questions to discuss

- How did the conflict make you feel?
(or pick a bear card to show how you felt in this situation)
- What action did you take to deal with the conflict?
- What is your relationship like with that person now?
- How would you describe your usual response to conflict?
(or pick a bear card that shows your usual response to conflict)
- What are the positive aspects of your response to personal conflict?
- What are the less positive aspects of your approach to personal conflict?
- How could your approach to conflict affect the way you deal with difficult situations involving disagreements with other adults about a child or young person in your care?

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence that the applicant can deal with conflict using appropriate communication (Competency B3).

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessor

Information from this activity will be needed when filling out the Section 11.3 'Household profile' in so keep a good note of details provided.

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence that the applicant has a personal and emotional support network and identifies the impact of fostering (Competency B1a, B1b).

5. Networks of support (30 minutes)

Activity

Ask applicant(s) to construct an ecomap using the following instructions. Individuals in a couple can each do their own, but can do it at the same time and in the same place.

Instructions for activity

Write your name in the middle of the paper.

Around your name, write (or draw) all the places and people you have spent time in or with in the past month. Some suggestions:

- friends and family
- clubs and hobbies
- entertainments
- exercise
- outdoor activities
- community services (for example, library, Centrelink)
- religious groups.

Circle in blue those you are in regular and strong contact with.

In red, add in events you do less frequently and people you see less frequently but that are still very significant to you. Some examples:

- annual friends' reunion
- seasonal sporting or community activity.

Questions to discuss

- Who in this network is likely to provide support to you if you become a foster carer?
- Are there any gaps in your ecomap you would like to fill?
- How might fostering positively and negatively affect your activities and the connections you currently have?

6. Working as a community service organisation team (20 minutes)

Explain the concept of team work in foster care.

‘A foster carer has to work with many other people as a team when providing care for a child or young person. These include:

- the caseworkers who are responsible for coordinating arrangements
- the child or young person’s family
- professionals who have direct contact with the child or young person, such as teachers, doctors, therapists, counsellors, and child welfare workers.’

Activity

Read through **Resource Sheet B.2 ‘Jim and Kay’s story’** and discuss the questions (on page 78 of this manual and also on page 9 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Explain team work with the child or young person’s family

If the following statement and questions were not covered in an Information exchange session or during discussion of Jim and Kay’s story, discuss them now.

‘There is a fundamental commitment in Looking After Children and the *Minimum standards and outcome objectives for home-based care services in Victoria* which recognises that it is essential for children and young people to maintain a connection to their family of origin.’

Questions to discuss

- What do you consider are some of the opportunities to support contact you can create as a foster carer?
- What do you consider are some of the challenges for you and your family?

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence that the applicant can work constructively with others, including the child or young person’s family, and see the benefits of working with others (Competency B1c, B2a, B2b).

PRACTICE POINTS

7. **Conclusion** (5 minutes)**Activity**

Thank the applicant(s) for their time.

If there are children or young people in the applicant's household, **arrange a time to interview each child or young person** prior to the next session.

Provide the self-evaluation checklist for the next interview.

Provide each applicant with Resource Sheet B.3 'Interview B: follow-up checklist' (photocopied from page 79 of this manual or page 10 of the *Applicant booklet*) to take away with them and consider and bring back to the next interview.

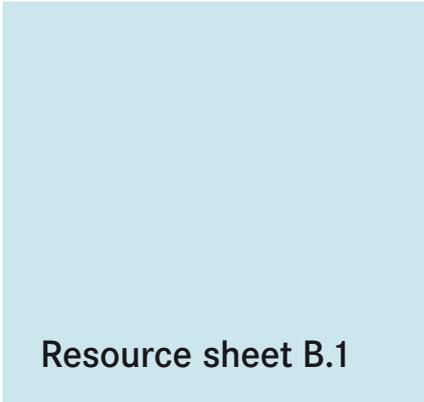
(If applicable) **Remind applicants** there will be an opportunity at the beginning of the next session to raise any issues that arose from the discussion about the applicants' relationship or from the conversation with their children.

Explain that the focus of the **next interview** will be on styles of parenting and caring.

After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- complete the 'Evidence of Competency B' (Section 10.3 of the *Assessment record*)
- add any relevant information to the evidence of competencies A,C or D (Sections 10.2, 10.4 and 10.5 of the *Assessment record*)
- if applicants withdraw the application at any stage, ask for the reasons and record these in the 'Withdrawal of application' (Section 2 of the *Assessment record*)
- if the community service organisation decides not to proceed with the assessment, convey the reasons for this decision verbally and in writing to the applicant(s). A copy of the letter must be attached to Section 2 of the *Assessment record*.

**Resource sheet B.1**

Overview of Interview B

Purpose of interview

The purpose of this session is to explore the applicant's ability to work effectively as part of a team.

Topics to be covered

1. Introduction
2. Review of assessment process
3. Team work with partner (*if applicable*)
4. Dealing with conflict
5. Networks of support
6. Working as a community service organisation team
7. Conclusion

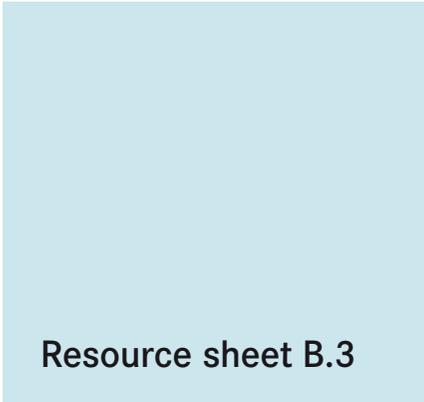
Resource sheet B.2**Jim and Kay's story**

Jim and Kay are foster carers with a community service organisation. The caseworker has just dropped around and let them know that the community service organisation has just arranged some new details for contact between Mary-Lee, the child they foster, and her family. The new arrangements are not convenient for Jim and Kay.

Jim and Kay feel angry they weren't consulted before the arrangements were made. The last time changes were made to make it easier for Mary-Lee to see her family, her family was unable to arrange transport and missed the visit altogether. On other occasions, Mary-Lee has stayed with her family and has been brought home much later than expected.

Questions to discuss

- If you were Jim or Kay, what might your next steps be?
- A case conference is an opportunity for all the people who are involved with a child or young person to meet to plan and coordinate their activities:
 - What are some benefits of Jim and Kay raising the issue of contact visits at the next case conference?
 - What ideas could the people at the case conference consider to promote the relationship between Mary-Lee and her family?
- How should Jim and Kay raise their concern with Mary-Lee's mother if Mary-Lee continues to get home late after her contact visits?
- Jim and Kay are considering going on holidays at a particular time with Mary-Lee. What should they do before making definite plans?

**Resource sheet B.3**

Interview B: follow-up checklist

One of the key qualities of foster carers is working well with others, including within one's own personal relationships and networks of support, as well as with those directly involved with the child or young person in care, such as community service organisation staff and family members of the child or young person.

1. I get strong personal and emotional support from people I am close to which would help me as a foster carer.

YES/NO

2. I am part of a network within my community which can help me in the tasks involved in foster caring.

YES/NO

3. I support the importance of assisting any child or young person in my care to establish and maintain a positive relationship with their family or other significant people in their life.

YES/NO

4. I am able to communicate clearly and constructively with others, even in times when I may be in conflict or have a disagreement with them.

YES/NO

5. Other comments:

Session with children of the household: expectations of fostering

Preparing for this session

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- children and young people living in the applicant household who are school aged or older.

Note: the term ‘children of the household’ is used throughout this material to refer to offspring of the applicant(s), and is not limited to those under 16 years of age. It can include adult offspring.

Location

This session is held face-to-face, either at the family home or the community service organisation.

Length of session

This session will take approximately 45 minutes with each child or young person.

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide opportunities to explore the expectations children of the household have about being a part of a family providing foster care.

It will cover:

- family relationships from the children’s perspectives
- the anticipated rewards and challenges of being in a fostering family
- the children’s readiness to foster.

Material required

- a copy of the *Applicant booklet* (includes on page 11, Resource Sheet: Session with children of the household ‘What some children in fostering families have said about fostering’, which is also on page 87 of this manual)
- circles of paper (‘Family stepping stones’) and marker pens (for option A on page 85 of this manual)

or

- large sheets of paper, old magazines, scissors, paper, glue and marker pens (for option B on page 86 of this manual).

Important issues

Preparing for this session

Ensure all the paperwork for outstanding checks has been completed and is returned (unless it is the community service organisation's policy to do this after the session):

- health checklist (completed by applicant)
- medical questionnaire (completed by doctor)
- Working with Children Check
- police records check
- check of Disqualified Register at Department of Human Services
- three personal references.

Timing of session

This session is best held when it is reasonably clear that the application will proceed, but when there is still time to process any issues raised by the children.

It is important that children are able to focus on the issues (not tired, hungry or distracted by other interests, such as television). It is not appropriate to have parents present during the session because this may make it difficult for the child's perspective to be heard clearly.

Information about the session

It is very important that parents and children of the household are told:

- this session will help them to think about whether fostering is a good option for their family at this time
- the responses made by children will be recorded as part of the foster care assessment and taken into account in determining the outcomes of that assessment
- responses by the children may be shared with their parents, particularly if they raise any concerns about suitability for fostering.

Session variations

Assessors may have to adapt the way they introduce the materials to make them suitable for use with children with different communication styles and developmental stages.

Assessing suitability to foster

Stop signals

The purpose of this session with children of the household is not to assess the children's competency. It is another part of the information gathering process to inform the decision made about the appropriateness of the foster carer application.

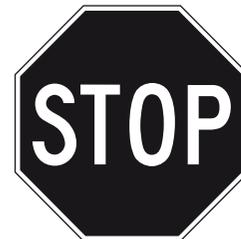
However, when there are children over the age of 16 years in the household who may have unsupervised contact with a child or young person in care, it is very important to ensure they have an appreciation of the needs of a child or young person in care, and are not just reflecting on fostering as it impacts on them.

During the course of the session with the children, information may be provided that indicates that essential aspects of foster carer competency will be not met. Such information may include:

- children reporting regular use of physical or other inappropriate punishment which would be likely to continue with children or young people placed in their care
- strong resistance on the part of children or young people in the household to the possibility of a foster child or young person joining the household
- a young person not appreciating that children and young people in care have particular needs and can be vulnerable
- strong opinions on the part of a child or young person which do not value differences (for example, in culture, race or religion).

In the event of such a response, the assessors should raise the issue with the applicants and indicate why their application would not be approved in those circumstances.

An invitation should be extended to further discuss the issues and their impact on the foster care application.



Outline of session with children of the household

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessor

The purpose of this session is not to assess the competency of the children. It is a way of gathering information to help the decision making process.

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Clearly explain the purpose of the session.

‘We are going to talk about being a foster family. This will help you and us to decide whether it would be something good for your family to do. We will be talking about this later with other people from our work and also with your mum and dad, so we will need to write things down so we can remember them properly.’

We remember that a while ago you did some writing or drawing about what it would be like to have a foster child or young person living in your family.’

Questions to discuss

- What do you think a foster family does?
- Have your parents spoken to you about fostering?

2. Family relationships (15 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- What do you like best about your family?
- What do you wish was different about your family?
- Children sometimes feel unsafe in their family. What things could make you feel unsafe in your family? Has this ever happened to you?
- How do you know whether your mum and dad are pleased with you?
- How do you know whether your mum and dad are angry with you?
- What are some of the ‘rules’ in your family?
(Another way to ask this question is: What are some things you aren’t allowed to do or things you are supposed to do?)
- Who decides on the ‘rules’?
- What happens if you break the ‘rules’?
- What happens if mum or dad break the ‘rules’?
- Who makes decisions? Do you get a say?

3. Thinking about fostering (10 minutes)

Activity

Show the child the Resource Sheet ‘What some children in fostering families have said about fostering’ on page 87 of this manual (also on page 11 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Read it through together.

Ask the child to pick two or three comments that match what they think foster care might be like for them.

Questions to discuss

- *(If they only picked positive comments)* What things would make being a foster sister or brother difficult at times?
- *(If they only picked negative comments)* How will you deal with the difficulties of being a foster sister or brother?
- What do you think will change for you if a child or young person who is in foster care comes to live with you?
- Do you want a child or young person who is in foster care to live in your family? Why?
- How would you know whether being a foster family wasn't working for you? What would you do about it?
- What would a child or young person in foster care enjoy or get out of living with your family?

4. Your family (10 minutes)

Question to discuss

- What should a foster child or young person know about your family before they come to live with you?

Optional activities

Option A: Family stepping stones

Activity

Make a family ‘stepping stone’ out of paper for each factor. Ask the child or young person to pick the three stepping stones they think are the most important.

PRACTICE POINTS

PRACTICE POINTS

Option B: Making a collage

Activity

Ask the child or young person to cut out pictures from magazines to make a collage about their family which could help a foster child to find out about their family and what it will be like living them.

Option C: Family motto

Activity

Ask the child or young person to come up with a family motto that would tell a foster child or young person a bit about how their family operates.

5. Conclusion (5 minutes)

Activity

Thank the children or young people for their involvement and check whether they have any questions about foster caring.

After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- complete 'Outcomes of session with children of the household' (Section 9.2 of the *Assessment record*)
- add any relevant information to the evidence of competencies A, B, C or D (Sections 10.2, 10.3, 10.4 & 10.5 of the *Assessment record*).

**Resource Sheet:
Session with
children of the
household**

What some children in fostering families have said about fostering

- ‘I never had a real sister; it was great to have a foster sister. She broke some of my stuff, but we got over it.’
- ‘The best thing was seeing a child improve.’
- ‘It was hard to have time with my mum on her own after we fostered. She seemed so busy all the time.’
- ‘Growing up in a foster family meant there were always other kids around.’
- ‘I’m proud of my family. We share our family and help children.’
- ‘I didn’t like it when they mucked up at school. It was embarrassing for me.’
- ‘I don’t like it when the children tell you some of the horrible things that have happened to them.’
- ‘You have to share your house and your family. I never had my own bedroom. That’s hard but it was worth it. We have a bigger family now.’

Interview C: Promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care

Background information

Competency C

This interview provides the opportunity to gather evidence (for example, responses provided directly by the applicant(s) and relevant examples described by the applicants) that the applicant(s) is/are competent in the area of Competency C. Evidence that relates to other competencies may also arise in this interview and should be recorded.

Competency C 'Promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care' covers the requirement to provide and advocate for the developmental and special needs of children and young people in foster care, including the need to promote the development of a positive identity and their active participation in decision making.

Element	Performance criteria
C1 Promote the social, emotional, psychological and intellectual development of children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies importance of individual attention for each child or young person which is responsive to his or her needs and development b. Demonstrates ability to provide an environment that will stimulate a child or young person's development (for example, an age-appropriate daily routine) c. Demonstrates ability to provide emotional warmth, care and appropriate affection to children and young people d. Describes strategies to develop life skills in children and young people while in care e. Identifies importance of promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in foster care
C2 Promote exploration and development of identity by children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies ways of encouraging children and young people to take pride in their own cultural identity, gender identity and abilities b. Describes opportunities for children and young people to participate in and learn about their cultural, religious and language heritage c. Identifies the importance of sharing and safely storing memorabilia during the placement d. Describes opportunities for children and young people to develop strengths, interests and abilities

<p>C3 Create opportunities and activities that encourage children and young people to express their feelings, needs and ideas and to participate in decisions that affect them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Listens attentively to children and young people to encourage them to express their needs and feelings b. Identifies that children and young people's needs will vary with their stage of development c. Recognises the need for children and young people in foster care to deal with feelings and issues that may arise from separation from their family d. Identifies the importance of children and young people being involved in decisions that affect them
<p>C4 Manage behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies own personal responses that can impact on appropriate behaviour management b. Describes effective strategies to manage behaviour of a child or young person which takes into account their development and life experiences and the foster carer's personal responses c. Describes approaches to behaviour management which are flexible and responsive to changing situations
<p>C5 Advocate on behalf of children and young people in foster care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifies specialist care, such as medical and educational services, as relevant for children and young people in foster care b. Identifies importance of advocacy for the needs of children and young people in foster care in order to secure relevant services or support

Relevant research and practice experiences for Interview C

The following research and practice findings* inform the assessment of Competency C: 'Promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care'.

Knowledge of and relationship with children exhibited by effective foster carers includes:

- displays of affection to children and young people and communication at the level of the child or young person (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- not personalising the child or young person's behaviour or becoming hurt by it (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- understanding what leads to children and young people behaving in particular ways (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Sandow 1998, as reported in Barker 1999; Sellick & Thorburn 1996, as reported in Barker 1999)
- being able to deal with and accept expressions of anger from children and young people and able to provide reassurance for children (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- empathising with deprived and damaged children (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Kay 1966, as reported in Tucker 2000)
- being able to recognise and meet the needs of children and young people at different developmental stages (practice wisdom)
- having no expectation that children or young people will be appreciative or grateful (practice wisdom)
- having a commitment to children and young people participating in decision making (practice wisdom supported by the principles that underpin the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*).

Personal qualities of effective foster carers include good physical and emotional health, including a positive self-esteem (practice wisdom).

Skills and values of effective foster carers are:

- flexibility and ability to adjust their own standards (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- an ability to negotiate change well (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- a willingness to learn and use support and work as part of a team (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Sellick & Thorburn 1996, as reported in Barker 1999)
- an interest in children and young people's education (Jackson 1983, as reported in Jackson 2001)
- an ability to make logical decisions (Ray & Horner 1990, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- a high degree of tolerance regarding school performance (Rowe 1976, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- low demands on religious observance (Rowe 1976, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)

- an ability to deal with conflict constructively (practice wisdom)
- effective advocacy on behalf of children and young people (practice wisdom)
- non-judgmental responses to the history, current situations and behaviour of children and young people and their family (practice wisdom)
- recognition of the importance of including family members and other significant people from the child or young person's past (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Sellick & Thorburn year)
- a commitment to children and young people participating in decision making (practice wisdom supported by the principles that underpin the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*)
- valuing of difference and diversity (practice wisdom supported by the principles that underpin the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*)

Outcomes for children are likely to be poorer if foster carers have:

- authoritarian child rearing styles (Sanchirico et al. 1998, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- possessiveness towards the foster child or young person (Sanchirico et al. 1998, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- a belief that a child or young person's development is entirely dependent on heredity (Wit & Adriani 1971; Van der Oever et al. 1979, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- no understanding of the relevance of families of children or young people or are actively working against a positive relationship between a child or young person and their family (practice wisdom).

* *This material is drawn from the Background paper, which is included in the Step by step Victoria package.*

Assessing Competency C

Proceed with caution



Stop signals



During the course of Interview C, an applicant may give responses that indicate that they are not yet competent in the area of promoting the positive development of children and young people in foster care. These responses indicate that they are not yet able to support and advocate for the developmental needs of children and young people in foster care, including the need to promote the development of a positive identity and active participation in decision making.

Such responses may include:

- The applicant has no relevant experience of caring for children or young people.
- The applicant has a rigid parenting style that does not recognise that children and young people have individual needs.
- The applicant routinely physically punishes children.
- The applicant does not recognise the right of children and young people to participate in decisions affecting them.
- The applicant has significant physical or mental health issues which render them unable to undertake the tasks of foster caring.
- The applicant does not recognise the significance of children's families or support their inclusion in a foster child or young person's life.
- The applicant is not willing to promote the child or young person's participation in their cultural, religious or language heritage.
- The applicant expresses paternalistic or explicitly racist views about other cultures.
- The applicant does not recognise and value that each child and young person has a unique identity.

In the event of such a response, or any other concerns by the assessors that the applicant has provided evidence that they are not or may not be competent to undertake the task of caring, the assessors should follow the steps as set out on page 16 of this manual. This may involve exploring the issue in more depth to make an informed decision about the applicant's competence.

Preparing for interview C

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- applicant(s).

Location

This session is held face-to-face, either at the family home or the community service organisation.

Length of session

This session will take approximately two hours.

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide opportunities to explore the applicant's ability to provide good quality day-to-day care for children or young people in foster care. It will cover the applicant's:

- awareness of children and young people's needs
- ability to communicate with children and young people
- ability to set boundaries and manage behaviour
- understanding of the need to promote a child or young person's identity
- commitment to encourage children and young people to participate in decision making
- awareness of diversity and special needs
- ability to advocate for a child or young person.

Material required

- bear cards (optional, see information on page 52 of this manual regarding bear cards)
- *Applicant booklet*, including Resource Sheet C.1 'Overview of Interview C', Resource Sheet C.2 'Chris's story', and Resource Sheet C.3 'Jai's story' also on pages 101 – 108 of this manual (choose the version that uses the setting most appropriate for the applicant and we suggest photocopying the story and the questions onto separate pages)
- a photocopy of Resource Sheet C.4 'Interview C: follow-up checklist' from page 109 of this manual
- a photocopy of Resource Sheet C.5 'Sexual abuse and children and young people' from page 110 of this manual.

Important issues

Feedback from checks

Check progress of all outstanding reports (medical, referees, background). Ensure applicant(s) has/have an opportunity to comment on any concerns raised.

Feedback from last session

This session begins with a brief review of the assessment process, and the opportunity for applicants and assessors to raise issues from the exploration of the applicants' relationship or the interview with children and young people.

If significant issues were raised for assessors, assessors should consider prior to the interview whether to explore these before doing the material set out for Interview C or to arrange a separate time to deal with these issues.

Gender, class and cultural bias

This session includes a focus on child rearing. Assessors must be aware of making judgments that may involve assumptions about gender, class and culture.

It is important that assessors find out about the issues that may impact on child rearing practices before interpreting them through their own personal experiences.

Session variations

This session contains a number of variations to reflect the range of situations in which people offer foster care. The assessor should pick variations that match the circumstances of the application (for example, type of care or preferred age group of child or young person).

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's ability to recognise areas of concern about their readiness or their children's responses (Competency A1a, A3b).



Outline of Interview C

1. Introduction and review of assessment process (15 minutes)

Activity

If information from checks (medical, referee, police) has raised concerns about an applicant's suitability, make sure the topic is addressed with the applicant(s).

Questions to discuss (if applicable)

- Did any issues arise for you as a couple following our conversation with each of you individually?
- Did your children have any responses following our interview with them that you want to raise with us?
- Are there any other issues about the assessment process that you would like to raise at this point?

Activity

Address any issues that have arisen for the assessors about the applicants' relationship or the children's responses.

Share with the applicant(s) your interim assessment recommendation made after the previous session.

Discuss the 'Interview B: follow-up checklist' completed by the applicant(s) after the previous session.

Discuss any marked differences in the applicant's self-assessment and your own assessment of the applicant.

Check that the applicant wishes to continue the process of assessment.

Highlight that the focus of this session is the issue of day-to-day care of children or young people.

Go through Resource Sheet C.1 'Overview of Interview C' in the *Applicant booklet* (also on page 101 of this manual).

2. Experiences of being parented (25 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- (*Option 1*) Use the bear cards to pick three pictures that show how it was for you growing up in your family.
or (*Option 2*) What are three words to describe what it was like growing up in your family?
- What were your parent's or carer's strengths?
- How much say did you get in family decisions that affected you?
- In what ways would you choose to care for a child or young person differently from them?
- (*Option 1*) Use the bear cards to pick three pictures that show how it was for you as a teenager in your family.
or (*Option 2*) What are three words to describe what it was like being a teenager in your family?
- What were your parent's or carer's strengths dealing with you as an adolescent?
- How much say did you get when you were a teenager in family decisions that affected you?
- In what ways would you choose to care for teenagers differently from your parents or carers?

3. Caring for a child or young person (15 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- What experience have you had caring for a child or young person?
- What experience have you had of caring in your home for a child or young person who is not your own biological child?
- Are you still in touch with the child or young person? Why?
- How do you think the experience of caring for that child or young person will affect the way you might provide care to a foster child or young person?
- How would you know whether a child or young person in your care was developing well for their age? Could you give some examples for children and young people of different ages?
- What would you do if a child or young person in your care did not appear to be developing well for their age?
- What activities and toys would you provide for a child of 18 months and another of four years?
- What would be the normal routine that you would provide for a child or young person within the age range that you plan to foster?
- If applicable, is this routine similar to what you provided for your own children?

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about whether the applicants can identify the need for individual attention for children and young people and to involve them in decision making. (Competency C1a, C3d).

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's style of caring (Competency C1a, C1b, C1c).

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's ability to manage behaviour, including being flexible and adapting to changing circumstances (Competency C4).



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's ability to assist children or young people to express their feelings, needs and ideas (Competency C3a).

4. Being a foster carer (25 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- Think of a time when you had to change your approach or behaviour as a parent or a foster carer (that is, you tried something with a child or young person and it didn't work and you had to try something different).
 - What is the example?
 - How did your approach change?
 - What was the impact of that change on you and on the child or young person concerned?
 - What did you learn from that experience?
- Part of a foster carer's role is to discipline children or young people. How would your approach to disciplining children or young people change as they grow (for example, what would be your approach at age two years, seven years and 14 years)?
- When you are unsure about what to do next when caring for a child or young person, how do you get ideas about other approaches to try?

Activity

With the applicant(s), read through Resource Sheet C.2 'Chris's story' (on page 102 of this manual and also on page 13 of the *Applicant booklet*). (You can assign an age to Chris that matches the age of the child or young person that may be placed with the applicant.)

Discuss questions at end of Resource Sheet C.2

5. **Jai's story – the foster carer's role** (35 minutes)

Activity

With the applicant(s), read through Resource Sheet C.3 'Jai's story' and discuss the questions.

Note: Three versions of this story are provided to suit the following situations:

- a short or long term care situation (on Resource Sheet C.3 Version 1, pages 103–104 of this manual and also on pages 15–16 of the *Applicant booklet*)
- a respite care situation (on Resource Sheet C.3 Version 2, pages 105–106 of this manual and also on pages 17–18 of the *Applicant booklet*)
- a foster care situation for an adolescent (on Resource Sheet C.3 Version 3, pages 107–108 of this manual and also on pages 19–20 of the *Applicant booklet*).

6. **Conclusion** (10 minutes)

Activity

Provide each applicant with a self-evaluation checklist (Resource Sheet C.4 'Interview C: follow-up checklist' photocopied from page 109 of this manual or page 21 of the *Applicant booklet*) to take away with them to consider and bring back to the next session.

Explain that sexual abuse will be discussed in the next interview.

'The main area to be looked at in the next session is the importance of keeping a child or young person safe. It will include looking at the issue of sexual abuse. This can sometimes be a difficult area to discuss, so to help you to prepare for it we have a short questionnaire for you to complete before the next session.

Unfortunately, many children and young people who come into foster care have experienced some form of sexual abuse. This is why it is important to ensure foster carers are equipped to deal with such an issue and can respond appropriately and sensitively.

If you yourself have experienced such abuse or know others who have, thinking about this issue may arouse strong feelings or very difficult memories. If you find this happening when you are completing the questionnaire, I would encourage you to contact someone you feel comfortable with and trust to talk it through with. You could contact one of the assessors if you would prefer.

PRACTICE POINTS

Tip for assessor

This activity requires the applicants to consider most of the elements of Competency C.



PRACTICE POINTS



You do not have to complete the questionnaire on your own if you are concerned it will raise very strong issues for you. You may choose to complete it in the next session with us in person.'

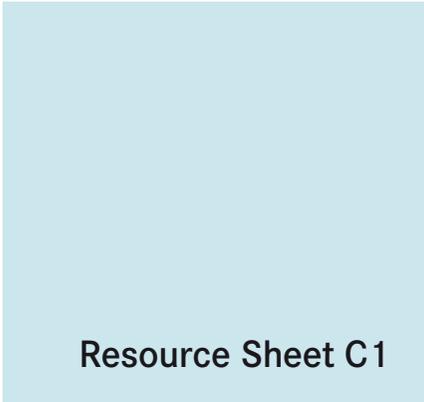
Activity

Ensure each applicant has a copy of the Resource Sheet C.5 'Sexual abuse and children and young people' to take with them (photocopied from page 110 of this manual or page 22 in the *Applicant booklet*).

After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- complete 'Evidence of Competency C' (Section 10.4 of the *Assessment record*)
- add any relevant information to the evidence of competencies A, B, or D (Sections 10.2, 10.3 and 10.5 of the *Assessment record*)
- if applicants withdraw application at any stage, ask for the reasons and record these in the 'Withdrawal of application' (Section 2 of the *Assessment record*)
- if the community service organisation decides not to proceed with the assessment, convey the reasons for this decision verbally and in writing to the applicant(s). A copy of the letter must be filed in Section 2 of the *Assessment record*.

**Resource Sheet C1**

Overview of Interview C

Purpose of interview

The purpose of this session is to explore ways of promoting the positive development of children and young people in foster care.

Topics to be covered

1. Introduction
2. Experiences of being parented
3. Caring for a child or young person
4. Being a foster carer – including Chris’s story
5. Jai’s story – the foster carer’s role
6. Conclusion

Resource Sheet C.2

Chris's story

You have just had Chris placed with you. Chris is sitting at the kitchen table having breakfast. You need to catch a bus with Chris in ten minutes to get to school/kindy/sporting event.

Suddenly Chris says to you, 'My mum doesn't cut toast like this. I want to ring my mum.'

Questions for discussion

- What might be your first 'instinctive' response in this situation? (*This may not be the best response to act on, but may be your first automatic thought or feeling.*)
- How would you deal with your response?
- What are some of the different issues that you need to consider when responding to Chris?
- What may Chris be feeling in this situation?
- What might you say or do next with Chris that could be helpful for Chris in this situation?

Resource Sheet C.3
(version 1)
page 1 of 2

Jai's story: version 1

(For those applying to provide short or long term care)

Part 1

Jai is a six-year old with red hair, freckles and a lovely smile. He is quite chubby and has severe asthma. He finds it difficult to keep still and be quiet, but he is really good at video games. He enjoys talking with people, but is not yet able to read or write at all.

Marie, Jai's mother, is a meticulous housekeeper and feeds and dresses Jai carefully. She follows a very particular diet based on the writings of a small religious group. In particular she avoids egg-based products. She works shifts at a local supermarket.

Jai was reported to the child protection authorities as a child at risk of harm when teachers at his school raised concerns about his interaction with other children involving sexual activities. It was clear through Jai's conversations and drawings that he had experienced sexual abuse involving a male.

Marie appears to be unaware of and unable to meet many of Jai's needs. She has had a series of boyfriends living with her, but denies that any of them could have abused Jai. Her punishments for Jai include locking him in a dark cupboard for long periods of time and gagging him when he 'talks too much'. She talks about Jai as a child who is destined to damage himself and others.

The court has decided that Jai's needs will be best met through a long term placement in a foster care setting.

Part 2

Jai has just been placed with a foster carer, Olga. Jai will be seeing his mother regularly. His mother sends him cards and occasionally gifts. Olga keeps these in a special box with other memorabilia of Jai's, such as photos, school awards and his drawings.

Jai is now in his second year of schooling but is still operating at a pre-school level, unable to associate letters and sounds. There is some question about whether Jai has an intellectual disability. Jai still needs a great deal of assistance to get dressed. He calls for help to have his bottom wiped after going to the toilet. He soils himself regularly.

Jai often tells stories to get out of trouble.

Jai is on medication for asthma. He has required treatment at hospital on three occasions because of asthma attacks. His mother has requested that his foster carer respect her religious beliefs, which means Jai should not eat eggs or any products made of eggs.

Discussion questions (version 1 – short or long term care)

- What sorts of skills could Olga assist Jai to develop?
- How might Olga help with Jai’s schooling?
- Olga is used to cooking with eggs. If you were Olga, what would you do to deal with Jai’s family’s religious ideas?
- If you were Olga, what strategies might you use to deal with Jai’s story telling?
- Olga thinks that it would be beneficial for Jai to be involved in a regular sporting activity. If you were Olga, how would you involve Jai in organising this?
- Even when children or young people have been hurt by their parent, they usually still have strong connections with them. How may Jai feel as a result of not being able to live with his mum? If you were Olga, what could you do to support Jai? How could the memorabilia collected by Jai and Olga, such as photos and letters, help Jai to deal with his separation from his mother?
- How might Olga help with Jai’s schooling?
- One day Jai comes home from school very angry. He usually gives Olga a big hug when he gets home but today he pushes her away. He goes to his room. When Olga looks in a few minutes later she finds that the new curtains she has made for Jai’s room have been cut into pieces. Jai looks at Olga and says, ‘Someone has come into my room and wrecked the curtains’.
 - If you were Olga, how might you feel?
 - What would you want to do?
 - Would it be appropriate to act on your first response? Why? If no, how would you prevent yourself from acting on that response?
 - What are some ways that Olga could deal with the situation constructively?
- If Jai had particular special needs (for example, hearing loss or epilepsy), how could Olga ensure she is caring for Jai appropriately?
- It is important that children and young people in care keep in touch with their cultural identity. Assume Jai’s family is from a different ethnic group from Olga. If you were Olga, what are some things you could do to assist him to develop his ethnic and cultural identity?
- It is important that Aboriginal children and young people in care keep in touch with their community.
 - For Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai’s family is from a different Aboriginal community group from Olga’s. If you were Olga, what are some things you could do to help him to maintain his cultural identity?
 - For non-Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai’s family includes Aboriginal members. If you were Olga, what are some things you could do to help Jai to develop a positive Aboriginal identity?
- Olga wants Jai to feel positive about himself. If you were Olga, what are some ways you might help Jai to develop a positive self-identity?

Resource Sheet C.3
(version 2)
page 1 of 2

Jai's story: version 2

(For those applying to provide respite care)

Part 1

Jai is a six-year old with red hair, freckles and a lovely smile. He is quite chubby and has severe asthma. He finds it difficult to keep still and be quiet, but he is really good at video games. He enjoys talking with people, but is not yet able to read or write at all.

Marie, Jai's mother, is a meticulous housekeeper and feeds and dresses Jai carefully. She follows a very particular diet based on the writings of a small religious group. In particular she avoids egg-based products. She works shifts at a local supermarket.

Jai was reported to the child protection authorities as a child at risk of harm when teachers at his school raised concerns about his interaction with other children involving sexual activities. It was clear through Jai's conversations and drawings that he had experienced sexual abuse involving a male.

Marie appears to be unaware of and unable to meet many of Jai's needs. She has had a series of boyfriends living with her, but denies that any of them could have abused Jai. Her punishments for Jai include locking him in a dark cupboard for long periods of time and gagging him when he 'talks too much'. She talks about Jai as a child who is destined to damage himself and others.

The court has decided that Jai's need will be best met through a long term placement in a foster care setting.

Part 2

Jai has just been placed with a long term foster carer, Olga. Jai will be seeing his mother regularly. His mother sends him cards and occasionally gifts.

Jean, Bill and their family will be providing respite care for Jai for one weekend each month. This will provide Olga with a regular break, and extend the care and support network available to Jai.

Jai is now in his second year of schooling, but is still operating at a pre-school level, unable to associate letters and sounds. There is some question about whether Jai has an intellectual disability. Jai still needs a great deal of assistance to get dressed. He calls for help to have his bottom wiped after going to the toilet. He soils himself regularly.

Jai often tells stories to get out of trouble.

Jai is on medication for asthma. He has required treatment at hospital on three occasions because of asthma attacks. His mother has requested that his foster carer respect her religious beliefs, which means Jai should not eat eggs or any products made of eggs.

Discussion questions (version 2 – respite care)

- How could Jean and Bill assist with Jai’s schooling?
- Jean and Bill are used to cooking with eggs. If you were them, what could you do to deal with Jai’s family’s religious ideas?
- If you were caring for Jai, how would you deal with Jai’s story telling?
- Bill and Jean think it would be beneficial for Jai to be involved in a regular sporting activity. If you were caring for Jai, who do you think you would discuss this with?
- Even when children and young people have been hurt by their parent, they usually still have strong bonds with them. Bill and Jean notice that Jai is often quite agitated when he stays with them soon after contact with his mother, Marie. He is quite touchy and often very disobedient. If you were Jai’s foster carer, how would you handle this?
- One day Jai arrives at Bill and Jean’s place very angry. He usually gives them a big hug when he gets there but today he pushes them away. He goes to the room he sleeps in. When Jean looks in a few minutes later he has done a poo on the floor and is starting to smear it on the new curtains which Jean has just finished making.
 - If you were Jai’s foster carer, how might you feel?
 - What would you want to do?
 - Would it be appropriate to act on your first response? Why? If no, how would you prevent yourself from acting on that response?
 - What are some ways that a foster carer could deal with the situation constructively?
- If Jai had particular special needs (for example, hearing loss or epilepsy), how could Bill and Jean ensure they are caring for Jai appropriately?
- It is important that children and young people in care keep in touch with their cultural identity. Assume Jai’s family is from a different ethnic group from Bill and Jean. What might they do to help him to develop a positive identity?
- It is important that Aboriginal children and young people in care keep in touch with their community.
 - For Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai’s family is from a different Aboriginal community group from Bill and Jean. If you were Bill and Jean, what are some things you could do to help him to maintain his cultural identity?
 - For non-Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai’s family includes Aboriginal members. If you were Bill and Jean, what are some things you could do to help Jai to develop a positive Aboriginal identity?
- Bill and Jean want Jai to feel positive about himself. If you were Bill and Jean, what are some ways you might help Jai to develop a positive self-identity?

Jai's story: version 3

(For those applying to provide care for adolescents)

Part 1

Marie, Jai's mother, is a meticulous housekeeper and fed and dressed Jai carefully. She follows a very particular diet based on the writings of a small religious group. In particular, she avoids egg-based products. She works shifts at a local supermarket.

When Jai was in primary school, he was reported to the child protection authorities as a child at risk of harm when teachers at his school raised concerns about his interaction with other children involving sexual activities. It was clear through Jai's conversations and drawings that he had experienced sexual abuse involving a male.

Marie appears unaware of and unable to meet many of Jai's needs, She had a series of boyfriends living with her, but denies that any of them could have abused Jai. Her punishments for Jai included locking him in a dark cupboard for long periods of time and gagging him when he 'talked too much'. She talked about Jai as a child who is destined to damage himself and others.

Jai was placed in long term care with a foster carer, Olga. Jai sees his mother regularly. She sends him cards and occasionally gifts. Olga encourages Jai to keep these cards in a special box with his other memorabilia, such as photos, school awards and his old drawings.

Part 2

Jai progressed well in Olga's care but new issues have emerged as he has reached adolescence. Jai is now aged 15. He is sometimes withdrawn and struggles to make friends his own age, preferring much younger or older acquaintances. He is behind at school and sometimes truants. He talks to Olga a lot about girls and what sort of girlfriend he wants. He comments a lot about how much he is growing.

Resource Sheet C.3
(version 3)
page 1 of 2

Discussion questions (version 3 – adolescent care)

- What sorts of skills could Olga help Jai to develop?
- How could Olga assist with Jai's schooling?
- Olga is used to cooking with eggs. If you were Olga, what would you do to deal with Jai's family's religious ideas?
- Olga thinks it would be beneficial for Jai to be involved in a regular sporting activity or other exercise. If you were Olga, how would you start to organise this?
- If you were Jai's foster carer, how would you ensure Jai has appropriate sexual information and education?
- Jai has been looking forward to his fifteenth birthday celebration. He is excited about go-karting, so he and Olga are planning the occasion. When Olga ask whether there is anyone from school he wants to ask, Jai's mood changes. 'As if,' he says. 'They'll keep asking me why my real mother isn't organising my party.' Swearing loudly, he leaves the kitchen, deliberately pulling the tablecloth with him so that plates and glasses fall on the floor and shatter.
 - If you were Olga, how might you feel?
 - What would you want to do?
 - Would it be appropriate to act on your first response? Why? If no, how would you prevent yourself from acting on that response?
 - What are some ways that a foster carer could deal with the situation constructively?
- How could Jai's memorabilia (cards, photos and so on) assist him to deal with the fact he has two families: his foster family and his birth family?
- If Jai had a particular special need (for example, hearing loss or epilepsy), how could Olga ensure she is caring for Jai appropriately?
- It is important that children and young people in care keep in touch with their cultural identity. Assume Jai's family is from a different ethnic group from Olga's. What might she do to help him to develop a positive identity?
- It is important that Aboriginal children and young people in care keep in touch with their community.
 - For Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai's birth family is from a different Aboriginal community group from Olga. If you were Olga, what are some things you could do to help him to maintain his cultural identity?
 - For non-Aboriginal foster carers:
Assume Jai's family includes Aboriginal members. If you were Olga, what are some things you could do to help Jai develop a positive Aboriginal identity?
- Olga wants Jai to feel positive about himself. If you were Olga, what are some ways you might help Jai to develop a positive self-identity?

Resource Sheet C.4

Interview C: follow-up checklist

One of the key qualities of foster carers is to promote the positive development of children and young people in out-of-home care.

1. Do I treat each child and young person as an individual, with their own social, emotional and intellectual needs?
YES/NO
2. Will I ensure children and young people in my care get access to information and services to meet their specific cultural needs (for example, through the Aboriginal Lands Council, language schools, mosques and so on)??
YES/NO
3. Can I listen to and encourage children and young people to express their feelings and ideas?
YES/NO
4. Do I encourage children and young people to be involved in all decisions that affect them?
YES/NO
5. Can I help a child or young person to maintain contact with his or her family while they are in my care?
YES/NO
6. Do I make sure children and young people get services that help them to develop?
YES/NO
7. Comments

Resource Sheet C.5

Questionnaire: sexual abuse and children and young people

1. What sexual issues is it important to talk about with your children? Why?

2. A child or young person is sexually abused when any person uses their authority or power over the child or young person to engage in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity and may include fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, or vaginal or anal penetration by finger, penis or any other object.

Sexual abuse can include behaviour that does not involve actual touching, such as forcing a child to watch pornography or masturbation, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exploitation through pornography or prostitution.

Children under 16 years of age cannot give consent to sexual activity (except under very strict guidelines as identified in the Crimes Act (1958) (Vic). Consent is not a defence to sexual abuse of children.

How could you prevent a child or young person in your care from being sexually abused?

3. Have you had any experience of child sexual abuse?

This may be your own experience or that of a person close to you. *(If not, go on to the final question on this sheet.)*

- In what ways did the abuse affect your life as a child and as an adult?
- How do you deal with the impact of the abuse in your life?
- How might the abuse influence you as a foster carer?

4. If a child or young person in your care disclosed to you that they had been sexually abused, what emotional response might you have to this?

Interview D: Provide a safe environment that is free of abuse

Background information

Competency D

This interview provides the opportunity to gather evidence (for example, responses provided directly by the applicant(s) and relevant examples described by the applicant(s)) that the applicant(s) is/are competent in the area of Competency D. Some of the evidence related to the first element of Competency D will have also been gathered in other assessment activities, including the home and environment check.

In addition, this interview allows the assessor to gather information about the final element of Competency A 'Making an informed decision on readiness to become a foster carer.' Evidence that relates to other competencies may also arise in this interview and should be recorded.

Competency D covers the requirement to provide a safe and respectful home environment for children and young people in foster care.

Element	Performance criteria
D1 Provide a safe environment for the physical safety of children and young people in care	a. Home meets minimum standards required for foster care placement b. Identifies the need to ensure children and young people in foster care are not physically punished c. Identifies importance of appropriate health and hygiene practices in foster carer's home
D2 Implement care practices that support the protection of children and young people	a. Identifies impact of emotional abuse on children and young people b. (If applicable) Demonstrates that the effect of their own experiences of abuse will not impede their ability to focus on the needs of a child or young person in foster care c. Describes strategies to keep children and young people safe from abuse d. Describes strategies to support and promote the wellbeing of the foster carer's own children during the foster care placement e. Recognises the importance of maintaining confidentiality f. Demonstrates the appropriate exchange of information on a need-to-know basis

Relevant research and practice experiences for Interview D

The following research and practice findings* inform the assessment of Competency D: 'Providing a safe environment that is free of abuse.'

Knowledge of and relationship with children exhibited by effective foster carers includes:

- an understanding of what leads to children and young people to behave in particular ways (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Sandow 1998, as reported in Barker 1999; Sellick & Thorburn 1996, as reported by Barker 1999)
- an ability to deal with and accept expressions of anger from children and young people and provide reassurance for children and young people (Juratowitch & Smith 1996)
- empathy with deprived and damaged children (Juratowitch & Smith 1996; Kay 1966, as reported by Tucker 2000).

Personal qualities of effective foster carers include non-judgmental responses to the history, current situations, and behaviour of children and young people and their family (practice wisdom).

Outcomes for children and young people are likely to be poorer if foster carers:

- believe that a child or young person's development is entirely dependent on heredity (Wit & Adriani 1971; Van der Oever et al. 1979, as reported in Barber & Gilbertson 2001)
- avoid contact with outsiders (Frances 1992, as reported in Tucker 2000). Note: Frances reviewed families in which sexual abuse had occurred in order to identify implications for assessment of foster carers. Frances could identify no clear-cut predictors, although he did identify families that avoid interaction with outsiders and have minimal communication within the family as concerning. Frances cautioned that this information could only be used as broad guidance in making an assessment.

** This material is drawn from the Background paper, which is included in the Step by step Victoria package.*

Assessing competency D

Proceed with caution



Stop signals



During the course of Interview D, an applicant may give responses that indicate they are not yet competent in the area of providing a safe environment that is free of abuse. These responses indicate that they are not yet able to provide a safe and respectful home environment for children or young people in foster care.

Such responses may include:

- The applicant's style of interaction with children and young people is emotionally abusive.
- The applicant does not recognise the negative impact of sexual abuse on children and young people.
- The applicant is not willing to operate within 'house guidelines' that assist in keeping children or young people safe and minimise allegations of abuse.
- The applicant is overwhelmed by their own experiences of abuse and would be unable to respond to the needs of a child or young person.
- The applicant has a history of abusing or neglecting a child or young person.
- The applicant has a criminal record of inappropriate behaviour affecting children or young people.

In the event of such a response, or any other concerns by the assessors that the applicant has provided evidence that they are not or may not be competent to undertake the task of caring, the assessors should follow the steps as set out on page 16 of this manual. This may involve exploring the issue in more depth to make an informed decision about the applicant's competence.

Preparing for Interview D

Participants

The following people participate in this session:

- assessors
- applicant(s).

Location

This session is held face-to-face, either at the family home or the community service organisation.

Length of session

This session will take approximately two hours.

Purpose of session

The purpose of this session is to provide opportunity to explore the applicant's ability to provide a safe environment that is free of abuse. It will cover the applicant's:

- ability to address issues of emotional abuse
- understanding of the impact of sexual abuse on children and young people
- ability to put strategies in place to protect children and young people
- response to the potential for allegations of abuse against foster carers
- understanding of confidentiality.

Material required

- *Applicant booklet*, pages 23–31 (including Resource Sheet D.1 'Overview of Interview D', Resource Sheet D.2 'Mandi's story', Resource Sheet C.5 'Questionnaire: Sexual abuse and children and young people', Resource Sheet D.3 'Robert's story', Resource Sheet D.4 'Possible house guidelines', Resource Sheet D.5 'Scale of sharing information' and Resource Sheet D.6 'Bianca and Jamie's story', also on pages 122–126 of this manual)
- a photocopy of Resource Sheet D.7 'Which child or young person would you be able to provide care for?', from page 32 of the *Applicant booklet* and page 128 of this manual.

Important issues

Strong responses to abuse issues

Discussion of abuse can be confronting and may stir strong feelings in applicants or awaken old memories. This may relate to different forms of abuse: emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

A pre-session questionnaire given to applicants provides a way to process the issue. It has an emphasis on sexual abuse because it can be difficult for people to discuss their experiences in this area.

An applicant is not unsuitable as a foster carer if they have themselves experienced child sexual assault or other forms of child abuse; however, he or she must have been able to deal with the experience so that it does not impede their ability to care for a child or young person.

While not all children and young people in care have experienced sexual abuse, it is a relatively common experience which many children and young people take time to disclose. This makes it impossible to be sure that any child or young person has not had this experience. Foster carers must be emotionally able to recognise and deal with this issue from the perspective of the child or young person in their care rather than their own.

Many applicants will have a strong personal response to abuse; however, indicators that an applicant is not yet ready to meet the needs of a child or young person in foster care would include the applicant being flooded with deep and overwhelming grief or anger about their own experience of abuse whenever the issue is discussed.

An applicant may request they discuss sexual abuse issues separately from their partner so they can talk about experiences they have not shared with their partner. Assessors must ensure the focus stays on the impact of that experience on the applicant's ability to provide foster care and include a discussion on how their partner will be involved in that process.

In some situations, it may be necessary to suspend the assessment process and encourage the applicant to seek assistance to deal with the impact of their own experiences on themselves and their relationship.

Feedback from checks

Ensure all documentation from all checks has been finalised so that applicants have an opportunity to comment on any concerns that may be raised:

- health checklist (completed by applicant)
- medical questionnaire (completed by doctor)
- Working with Children Check
- police records check
- check of Disqualified Register at Department of Human Services
- three personal references.

Session variations

This session is suitable for all applicants. The case scenarios do not stipulate ages of children or young people. The assessor may assign an age to a character to assist the applicant(s) to focus on responses relevant to a particular age group.

In some cultures, there may be restraints on males talking freely with females about issues such as sexual abuse. In this situation, an assessor team comprising a male and a female can individually talk to applicants of the same sex as them. If there is not a suitable mix of sexes, it may be necessary to bring in an additional assessor to ensure the material is covered with all applicants.

Outline of Interview D

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Activity

If **information from checks** (medical, referee, background) has raised concerns about an applicant's suitability, make sure the topic is addressed with the applicant(s).

Share with the applicant(s) your interim assessment recommendation made after the previous session.

Discuss the 'Interview C: follow-up checklist' completed by the applicant(s) after the previous session.

Discuss any marked differences in the applicant's self-assessment and your own assessment of the applicant.

Check that the applicant wish to continue the process of assessment.

Remind them that the focus of this session is on the issue of keeping children and young people safe.

Go through Resource Sheet D.1 'Overview of Interview D' (on page 122 of this manual and also on page 23 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Explain reason for discussing abuse.

'Children and young people who come into foster care have often experienced abuse. This may be:

- physical abuse
- neglect
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse.

This can sometimes raise issues for foster carers who had similar experiences themselves.

Having experienced abuse does not make an applicant unsuitable to care for a child or young person. Often it can mean they have a greater understanding of a child or young person's experience. However it is important that foster carers who were themselves abused have dealt with that situation so they can focus on the child or young person's needs and not just their own needs.'

2. Impact of abuse (10 minutes)

Questions to discuss

- Do you think you were abused in any way (physically, sexually, emotionally) or suffered neglect as a child?
- How has this abuse affected you personally and how you care for children?

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's ability to recognise areas of concern about their readiness (Competency A3b).



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about the applicant's ability to focus on the child or young person's needs not just their own experience (Competency D2b).

PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence that the applicant can recognise the impact of emotional abuse on children and young people (Competency D2a).



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence about whether the applicant, when dealing with sexual abuse, can focus on ways of keeping children and young people safe and on the child or young person's needs and not just their own experience (Competency D2b, D2c).



3. Responding to children or young people who have been abused (20 minutes)

Explain the focus of this interview.

'In the assessment process we have already covered some issues relating to protecting children and young people. We are very careful to check that the housing and care provided will not lead to these children or young people being deprived or neglected. We have talked about discipline and why no foster carer is allowed to use physical force in discipline.

This session will focus on protecting children and young people, especially from emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

Building confidence and self-esteem in children or young people is an important task for foster carers, especially when the children or young people have been exposed to emotional abuse in the past.'

Activity

With the applicant(s), read Resource Sheet D.2 'Mandi's story' (on page 123 of this manual and also on page 24 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Discuss questions at end of Resource Sheet D.2

4. Child sexual abuse (20 minutes)

Activity

Go through the Resource Sheet C.5 'Questionnaire: Sexual abuse and children and young people' which applicants were given at the previous session and discuss each question on it (from page 110 of this manual and also on page 22 of the *Applicant booklet*).

5. Responding to a child or young person who has been sexually abused (10 minutes)

Activity

With the applicant(s), read through Resource Sheet D.3 'Robert's story' (on page 124 of this manual and also on page 26 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Discuss questions at end of Resource Sheet D.3.

6. Reducing risk of abuse (20 minutes)

Explain importance of safe household practices.

‘One of the challenges of foster caring is providing an environment where children or young people feel safe from abuse. Sometimes children or young people who have been abused interpret actions as if they have sexual overtones. It is therefore very important to minimise the possibility that a child or young person will feel confused or uncertain about the intention of your actions.’

Activity

Show the applicant(s) **Resource Sheet D.4** ‘Possible house guidelines’ (on page 125 of this manual and also on page 28 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Questions to discuss

- How could these guidelines help to keep children or young people safe from abuse?
- How do these guidelines reduce the possibility that a child or young person may allege they have been abused?
- Can you think of any other guidelines to help children or young people to feel safe, which may be appropriate for your particular household?
- (*For applicants with other children at home*) How could such guidelines benefit your own children?
- How are these rules different from how you currently care for your children? How will these rules be introduced into your household if you become a foster carer?

7. Confidentiality (15 minutes)

Introduce issue of confidentiality.

‘Another way of helping children and young people to feel safe is to respect their rights to confidentiality. People’s personalities can influence the challenges they face in sharing information appropriately.’

Activity

Show the applicant(s) **Resource Sheet D.5** ‘Scale of sharing information’ (on page 126 of this manual and also page 29 of the *Applicant booklet*).

PRACTICE POINTS



Remember, only ask these questions if you don’t have evidence the applicant can focus on the needs of a child or young person who has experienced abuse (Competency D2a, b, c).



PRACTICE POINTS

Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence that the applicant can recognise the importance of confidentiality and appropriate exchange of information (Competency D2e, D2f).



Remember, only ask these questions if you don't have evidence of the applicant's ability to recognise areas of concern about their readiness and need for training (Competency A3b, A3c).

Questions for discussion

- Where would you put yourself on the scale of one to six on the resource sheet?
- What is a situation in which you had to deal with confidential information?
- How did you handle it?
- If the situation arose again, would you do it differently?

Explain the concept of 'need-to-know'.

'Children and young people in care are entitled to confidentiality. A foster carer often has a lot of information about the child or young person's background and experience; however, this information should only be shared with those who need to know.'

Activity

With the applicants read Handout D.6 'Bianca and Jamie's story' (on page 127 of this manual and also on page 30 of the *Applicant booklet*).

Questions for discussion

- Which answer would you choose and why?
- In what way might your response to other parents be different from your response to a similar enquiry from the children's teacher? Why?
- If a child or young person in your care asked you to keep a secret about them, would you always agree? Why?
If no, what sort of information would you pass on and to whom?

8. Next steps (25 minutes)

Questions for discussion

- What have you learned about fostering from the assessment process so far?
- What issues do you need to consider in making a final decision about offering yourself as a foster carer?
- What additional training do you think would be helpful for you as a foster carer?
- What do you feel your family could offer a child or young person?

Activity

Provide a copy of Resource Sheet D.7 ‘Which child or young person would you be able to care for?’ (photocopied from page 128 of this manual) .

Explain the importance of honest responses to this sheet so that assessors can make realistic recommendations.

Allow applicant(s) approximately 10 minutes to complete the resource sheet.

Collect the completed resource sheet and allow applicant(s) to explain any issues it raised for them.

Tell applicant(s) they are near to the completion of the assessment process. The next step will involve them being provided a draft copy of the Section 10 ‘Summary report and recommendations’ for their comment. Give applicant(s) a clear timeframe in which they will receive the draft copy and be able to give their feedback. Remind applicant(s) they can be in contact with the assessors about any assessment issues. If they haven’t already completed pre-service training, they will need to do this prior to the assessment process being completed.

PRACTICE POINTS



After the session

Once the session is complete, the assessor must:

- complete ‘Evidence of Competency D’ (Section 10.5 of the *Assessment record*)
- complete the final element of ‘Evidence of Competency A’ (Section 10.2 of the *Assessment record*)
- add any relevant information to the evidence of competencies A,B or C (Sections 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4 of the *Assessment record*)
- complete the household profile (Section 11.3 of the *Assessment record*)
- if applicants withdraw application at any stage, ask for the reasons and record these in the ‘Withdrawal of application’ (Section 2 of the *Assessment record*)
- if the community service organisation decides not to proceed with the assessment, convey the reasons for this decision verbally and in writing to the applicant(s). A copy of the letter must be filed in Section 2 of the *Assessment record*.

Resource sheet D.1

Overview of Interview D

Purpose of interview

The purpose of this session is to provide an opportunity to explore the ability of the applicant to provide a safe environment that is free of abuse.

Topics to be covered

1. Introduction
2. Impact of abuse of children and young people
3. Responding to children or young people who have been abused
4. Child sexual abuse
5. Responding to a child or young person who has been sexually abused
6. Reducing risk of abuse
7. Confidentiality
8. Next steps

Resource Sheet D.2

Mandi's story

Mandi has experienced emotional abuse. As a young child she was subjected to constant criticism and very rarely experienced praise and affection. She was often scapegoated for anything that went wrong in her family.

Even after a number of years in foster care, she finds it difficult to identify anything that is good about herself or other people. She receives compliments with suspicion and is verbally aggressive in many situations.

Mandi's case plan includes monthly contact with her mother. Sometimes these visits go well, but often arrangements are changed at the last minute. Mandi's mother will make extravagant promises to Mandi which she finds difficult to keep.

Mandi is in your care. She has come home from school with a report that has many negative comments on it. She was supposed to stay with her mother this weekend, but she got a telephone message saying the visit will need to be postponed because her mother is unwell. Mandi's room is a mess, although she said she would tidy it. You want to discuss with her some of the issues raised in her report, including her difficult relationship with one particular teacher. She heads straight outside to feed the pet, which is one of her daily chores.

Questions to discuss

- What do you think is happening for Mandi?
- How might you deal with the situation?
- If Mandi were six, would you have a different approach than if she were 14?
- Imagine Mandi has been in your care for three weeks. Now imagine she has been in your care for three years. Describe the differences between the approaches you might take in these two cases.
- How would you approach the situation if you had met the teacher and found him or her to be insensitive to Mandi's needs?

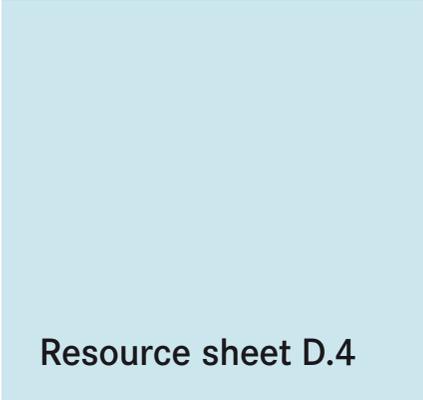
Resource sheet D.3**Robert's story**

Robert is a child in your care. Robert was sexually abused by an uncle over a long period of time. The situation caused great family conflict, with some members excusing the uncle's behaviour because of his ill health.

Robert blames himself for the break up of his family. He often engages in behaviour where he damages himself or his possessions.

Questions to discuss

- What might Robert be feeling?
- How might you respond to Robert if you were his foster carer?

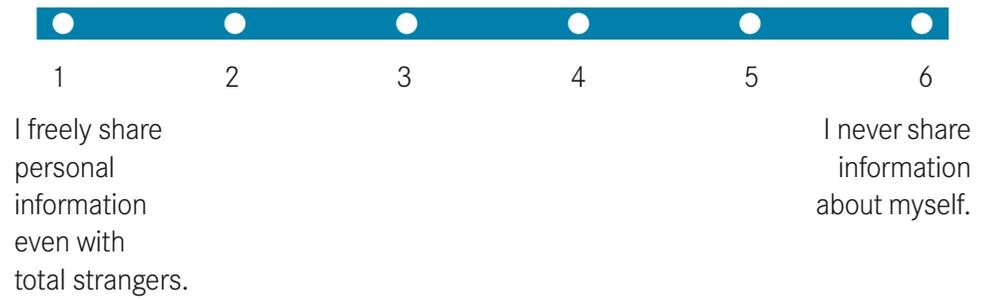
**Resource sheet D.4**

Possible 'house guidelines'

- Adults should always wear clothes when walking about the house.
- Wrestling games cease as soon as a child or young person says 'stop'.
- Cuddles are to be given in public spaces (for example, the lounge room or kitchen), not in beds.
- Bath younger children with the door to the bathroom open.
- Children should not play in bedrooms with closed doors.
- Adults don't use the toilet when children are in the bathroom.
- Children should not travel in the front seat of the car. Children should always travel in the back seat even if there are only two people in the car.

Handout D.5

Scale of sharing information



Handout D.6

Bianca and Jamie's story

You are a foster carer who has the care of two children, Bianca and Jamie. The children have been physically abused and there is a suspicion they may have been sexually abused.

Soon after you get the care of Bianca and Jamie you get into a conversation with some parents at the school. They are curious about the children's background. The parents know you are a foster carer.

What might you say and why?

- A. I'm caring for the children because they are not able to live with their parents at the moment.
- B. The children have experienced physical abuse so they need a lot of nurture and care at the moment. It is also possible that they have been sexually abused.
- C. Please explain to your children that Bianca and Jamie have had a really hard time. Their parents didn't take very good care of them, so it would be great if the kids in their classes were really nice to them.
- D. That's none of your business.
- E. Other _____

Resource Sheet D.7

Which child or young person would you be able to provide care for?

1. Age range

2. Sex

3. Would you be able to take siblings (more than one child from the same family?)

(Mark one) Yes No

4. Would you consider providing care for a child or young person who:

(mark if applicable)

- is from a different religion from yours?
- is from a different nationality from you?
- has a physical disability?
- has a developmental delay (for example, is a slow learner or has an intellectual disability)?

5. What needs and behaviours might you find difficult to handle and need more training in?

6. Any other comments?
