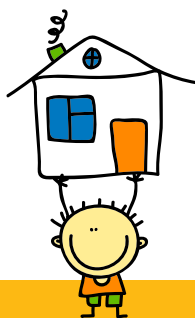


Foster Carers and Kinship Carers Guide

A Resource for Carers in the ACT



Foreword

Children and young people need nurturing and care to become independent, capable and caring adults. Our community values our children and young people and provides parents with the supports and assistance to care and provide for the needs of their children and young people.

For some children and young people, the care they require cannot be safely provided by their parents. For some children and young people, foster carers and kinship carers provide the necessary care for their healthy development. Sometimes this may be for short periods of time, at other times this may be for many years.

Carers provide for the needs of children or young people in their care as they would other children in their family. Many of these needs are easily taken for granted such as a warm bed, regular meals, help with homework, admiration and pride in what the children achieve, loving care and stability.

A carer's role is at times demanding, stressful and challenging. The role includes managing the effects of early childhood trauma with the child or young person in care, understanding the legal system within which care is provided and providing ongoing advocacy for the services needed by an individual child or young person.

Carers work in partnership with services to access the resources and supports necessary to provide appropriate care for a child or young person.

This Guide reflects this working partnership with the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and provides information that will assist carers in the responsibilities they have undertaken towards children and young people in their care.

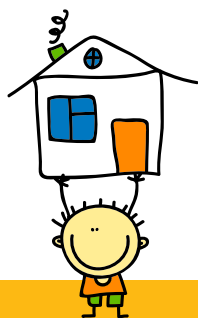
The Minister for Children and Young People, staff of this department, and I value the commitment and care provided by carers to the children and young people in my care.

I thank each carer for their care and contribution to improving the lives of the children and young people who are in my care.

I trust you will find this Guide useful in supporting the work you do and the care you provide to the children and young people in care.

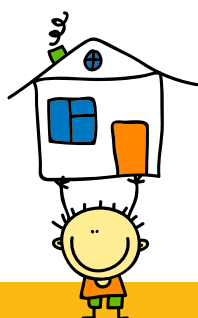
If you need further advice or information, I encourage you to contact your agency worker, Care and Protection Services caseworker or the carer liaison officer for advice and assistance.

Martin Hehir
Chief Executive
ACT Department of Disability,
Housing and Community Services
September 2010



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Introduction

The reasons that have led to children and young people being placed in care may impact on their development and well being. With appropriate care and support, the children and young people progress and achieve positive outcomes that enable them to grow and function within our community.

The care, commitment and support the children and young people receive from their approved carers is essential to their healthy development and well being. Carers provide structure and stability and give children and young people positive experiences. These are the essential building blocks upon which children and young people can grow, can predict their environment and develop and take risks in a manner that makes it possible to learn and make informed decisions about their future.

Through this process of development, the views and wishes of children and young people must be listened to and considered, they should be included in the decisions about their lives, and their cultural, religious, ethnic, racial and other needs must be respected and fostered.

These principles, supported through the legislation, also promote their dignity, their self respect and self reliance, essential elements in the development of their capacities and maturity.

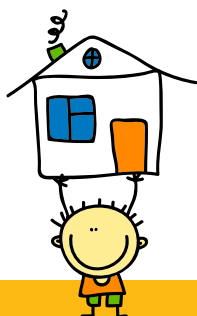
Carers, along with the child and young person's support team promote ongoing and safe contact between children and their parents and family. On occasions when children can return home, carers are crucial in assisting a child or young person to return to their parents care.

The decisions made by persons involved in caring for a child or young person, including the Courts, the Department, carers, care agencies, parents, families and agencies providing support must be made 'in the best interests of a child or young person' as determined by legislation.

This Guide, produced by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support in collaboration with the ACT Out of Home Care sector, kinship and foster carers is a resource that aims to provide information of most relevance to carers in understanding their role, responsibilities and entitlements.

The Office recognises and values the important role kinship and foster carers have in meeting the needs of children and young people in care. The Office is committed to supporting and working with carers and care agencies in promoting the healthy development of the children and young people.

Additional information is available at www.dhcs.act.gov.au and as identified throughout this Guide.



Purpose of the Guide

Foster carers and kinship carers work with their agency caseworker or a Care and Protection Services caseworker to provide care to children and young people who are unable to live with their parents.

This Guide aims to support this relationship by providing carers with information that helps to:

- always put the best interests of the child or young person first
- ensure that the child, young person and carer have an opportunity to contribute to decision making processes
- make sure each persons views and wishes are listened to, respected and considered
- clarify roles and responsibilities between carers and workers
- provide information that helps communication between carers and workers to occur, so that each is kept informed about issues relevant to the child or young person in care.

The Guide includes relevant information for carers and provides carers with advice on how to deal with situations that arise on a daily basis. The Guide does not include every issue and situation carers may encounter in their role.

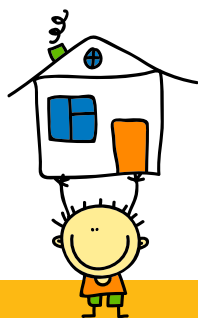
It addresses processes applying to foster carers and kinship carers together.

References to Agency/Care and Protection caseworker are to be read to reflect the process where foster carers will usually contact their agency caseworker and kinship carers will contact their Care and Protection Services caseworker.

Carers with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit will contact the worker in that Unit.

If you require more information or are unsure about something, please contact your agency worker, Care and Protection Services caseworker or the carer liaison officer for further advice.

Contact details are at the back of this Guide.



Children, young people and legal processes

The ACT child protection system is principally governed by the *Children and Young People Act 2008* (the Act) and policies and procedures as set out in the Care and Protection Services Manual.

The Act gives the chief executive of the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services authority and the responsibility to receive and investigate reports of abuse and neglect of children and young people, protect children and young people and provide children safe care when they cannot live with their parents.

The Act also gives the Courts the independent authority to determine, on the basis of evidence, whether a child or young person is in need of care and protection and what orders would best meet their needs and best interests.

All people involved with the care of a child or young person must comply with their Court order.

A copy of the Act is available at:
www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2008-19/default.asp

How children and young people enter the Care system

When Care and Protection Services decide that a child has been, or is likely to be abused or neglected, Care and Protection Services needs to consider if they can work with the parents to improve the care, safety and well being of the child or whether the child requires immediate protection.

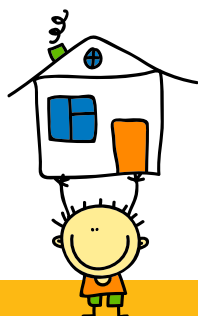
When Care and Protection Services works with parents to ensure the safety of the children, they offer support and assistance.

On occasion they may suggest the child enter care on a voluntary basis. This allows parents time to complete some tasks necessary for the safe return home of the child.

Children and young people may also enter the care system through:

- emergency action
- a family group conference agreement
- a care and protection Court order
- a transfer of orders from another State or Territory.

These are outlined below.



Children, young people and legal processes

A voluntary care agreement

Parents may voluntarily place their child in care by signing a voluntary care agreement (VCA). This agreement may be for short periods but may not extend for more than a total of six months.

If the agreement concerns a young person over the age of 15 years, it must be done with the young persons signed consent and in this case, the agreement may be for longer than six months.

A voluntary care agreement provides the chief executive with shared parental responsibility with the parent/s of the child. Significant decisions during the agreement will be made in consultation with the parent/s.

A parent may revoke an agreement in writing at any time. When this happens, a child must be returned to the care of their parents unless the chief executive has taken emergency action to protect the child or has obtained a Court order.

Family group conference agreements

These are agreements reached when a family group conference has taken place and the parent/s agree to transfer

parental responsibility of their child to a family member or significant person. The transfer of parental responsibility cannot be to the chief executive.

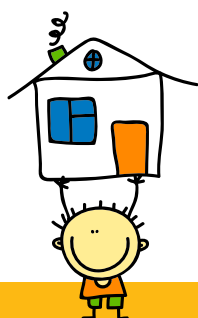
An agreement may be lodged with the ACT Children's Court. The Court may make an order that reflects the agreement and any changes to the Court order are made through an application to the Court.

Emergency action

When a child or young person is at immediate risk of abuse or neglect or likely to be if action is not taken, Care and Protection Services and police may take emergency action to protect a child or young person.

Care and Protection Services must immediately notify the Court when they have taken this action. Care and Protection may then work with the parents, may enter into a voluntary care agreement for the care of the child or may apply to the Court for ongoing orders for the care of the child within two working days.

If no application is made to the Court, the child must be returned to the care of their parents.



Children, young people and legal processes

The needs of the child, the cooperation of the parents and the severity of injuries or impact upon the child will determine an appropriate course of action.

Through emergency action, the chief executive is provided with daily care responsibility to meet the immediate needs of the child or young person.

Emergency action may be taken at any time of the day or night and children will require to be placed with carers at that time. The child may have few possessions, such as clothing or toiletries with them, and Care and Protection Services will provide carers with the very basic requirements at the time of placement.

The workers will try to obtain the child's belongings as soon as possible or provide carers with vouchers or approval to purchase necessary items. If you have concerns about the provision of items for a child in your care, please contact your worker or the carer liaison officer.

Care and protection orders

Care and Protection Services may apply to the ACT Children's Court for a child to be declared to be in need of

care and protection. The Court will make an order if it considers that order is required on the basis of evidence presented to the Court.

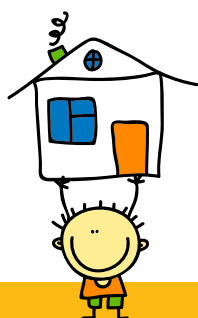
The Court may not make a final decision for some time. This is usually because it requires assessment reports or wants the parents to attend and receive assistance before making a final decision.

In the meantime, if the Court decides a child must remain in care, they will make interim orders. These orders apply until the next Court date when they are continued or may be changed.

The Court may order an assessment and this may involve the participation of a kinship carer, and in some rare instances, a foster carer.

The assessments are done by experts and a report is provided to the Court, the legal representative of the child, parents, Care and Protection Services and other parties.

The Court manages an application at Court by convening a case management conference (CMC) where all the parties are present.



Children, young people and legal processes

The parties to an application are: the child or young person (through their solicitor appointed by Legal Aid), each parent (and their solicitor), the chief executive (and their solicitor) and on occasion the Public Advocate.

The child or young person has the right to attend Court and may meet their solicitor prior to Court. The child also has the right to be kept informed about Court proceedings and have the processes explained in a way they will understand.

If the child or young person wishes to speak with their lawyer at other times, they should be supported to do this.

Carers are not usually parties to a care and protection application as they will be consulted and their evidence included in the documents prepared by Care and Protection Services for Court. These documents will be provided to the parents and the child.

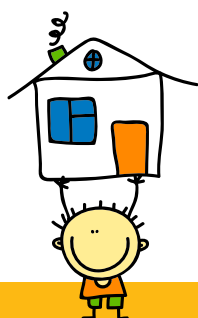
Carers should be advised when an application is before the Court and if required to give evidence. If a carer is required to give evidence, support will be provided by their agency worker or the Care and Protection Services caseworker and the Care and

Protection Services Court Unit. Sometimes carers decide to seek the permission of the Court to become parties to a care application. Carers are responsible for the legal costs arising from this decision unless prior negotiations have occurred with the Department.

The parties discuss the application at a CMC and may agree to a way forward. If there is agreement, the Court Registrar will record this and the Magistrate will, after considering the application, make the orders agreed.

If there is no agreement, the Magistrate may briefly hear from the parties and make an interim order before setting the matter for hearing. A hearing is when all the evidence for an application is considered by the Court and people are cross examined.

The Court may make many types of orders. Orders may also be made to include persons other than the chief executive as the persons responsible for the child. This may be in instances where the child has resided for a considerable period of time with a grandparent or some other relative.



Children, young people and legal processes

Types of orders

The main types of orders made by the Court are:

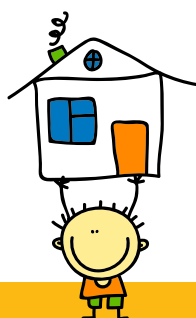
- residence orders: for deciding where and with who the child will live
- supervision orders: requiring the chief executive to supervise the child and the parents to speak with Care and Protection Services workers
- daily care responsibility and/or long term parental responsibility orders: to the chief executive, some other person or shared with a parent
- contact orders: who should have contact with the child, the regularity of contact etc
- specific issues orders: requiring other people to do (or not do) a certain thing eg. parents must attend counselling or a person must not contact or be within 100 metres of the child
- assessment orders: requiring people to attend an assessment, including children, the parents and significant others including carers.

Transfer of orders from other States and Territories

All States and Territories have legislation that allows for children and young people on care and protection orders to be transferred to the care of the jurisdiction in which they live.

The transfer must be agreed to by the receiving State or Territory and this must be in the best interests of the child or young person. Once transferred, the child is on an ACT care and protection order and any change to the order is made by the ACT Children's Court. The ACT transfers children in care when they have a stable and secure placement in another State or Territory and where their needs will be met by the resources of the other State or Territory.

Given the location of the ACT, many children live with their carers nearby, in Queanbeyan, Yass or Bungendore. Some children and their carers continue to be supported by the ACT while for some, a transfer to the care of the Department of Human Services in NSW has been suitable.



Children, young people and legal processes

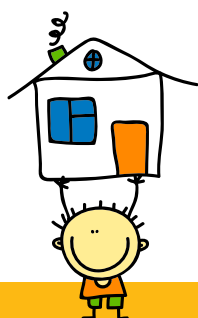
This is a decision made in consultation with those involved and on a case by case basis.

If you want additional information about this, please contact your agency worker or Care and Protection Services caseworker.

Can a decision of the Court be changed?

The final decision of the Children's Court may be appealed to the ACT Supreme Court, but this is rare. A Children's Court order may also be changed, with the permission of the Court.

This is usually necessary when an order needs to be continued after several years or the circumstances of the child or the parents have changed.



Out of home care

“Out of home care” is the term used to include all children and young people in care who are placed in an approved care environment. This includes children and young people who live with approved kinship carers, who live with foster carers, who live in residential care and in other arrangements.

Kinship care is when approved care is provided by a family member (extended family) or an adult significant to the child or young person.

The approval of all these care arrangements is provided by Care and Protection Services or a Court.

Types of care

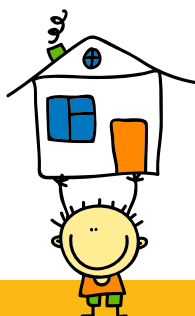
Kinship care

When a child or young person enters care, Care and Protection Services will enquire if there are family members who may be prepared to be assessed and if suitable, would provide care.

Family members may be initially assessed in an emergency and a full assessment completed after placement of the child has commenced. This may occur during after hours or when an urgent placement is needed.

An assessment includes the following:

- a Care and Protection Services worker visiting the home and assessing the environment for a child or young person
- speaking with the adult persons who live at the home
- seeking consent to undertake a criminal records check of all adults resident at the home
- assessing the carers suitability to meet the needs of the child or children.



Out of home care

Family members assessed as suitable will be approved by Care and Protection Services and the carers provided with a Specific Parental Authority form.

Foster care

Some children and young people may not have suitable family members to provide for their care. In such instances, Care and Protection Services will approach the out of home care agencies to obtain a suitable foster care placement. In an emergency, a placement with emergency carers may be organised.

Where possible, planned placements occur through consideration by the placement committee. Carers are selected considering the needs of the child, the family environment and the duration of the placement.

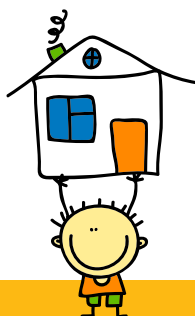
Respite care

Respite care is care that supports children and young people and also supports the carers and their family. Respite care for children in the care of the chief executive is available to all carers as part of the care plan.

Respite care is provided by approved carers for brief periods such as weekends, holidays or set days each month. Respite care may be provided by family members, carers or by an agency eg. Kese House who provide respite care for young people with a disability.

Respite care should be planned and included as part of the care plan. As part of planning, the child or young person's views and their involvement in the decision making process should occur.

Respite care is also available to families who do not have Care and Protection Services involvement. The families may contact an agency directly and the agency will assess and determine the suitability of respite care.

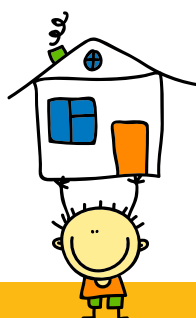


Out of home care

The processes for engaging, assessing and supporting foster carers and kinship carers has slight variations and the following table provides key information.

How carers are approved

Foster carers	Kinship carers
Foster carers are recruited, assessed, trained and supported by an Out of Home Care agency such as Barnardos, Marymead, Galilee and Life Without Barriers.	Kinship carers are assessed and supported by Care and Protection Services and trained through specific kinship training programs.
Care and Protection Services approves foster carers following an assessment and recommendation by the out of home care agency.	Care and Protection Services assesses and approves all kinship carers.
Once a foster carer has been approved, each approved foster carer is provided by Care and Protection Services with a General Parental Authority (GPA), indicating they are approved to care for children in care.	Kinship carers are assessed and approved to care for a specific child who is a member of the family or a significant person to the child. The approval is limited to the care of a child or children.
When a child is placed with a foster carer, Care and Protection Services will issue each approved foster carer with a Specific Parental Authority (SPA), giving the approved Carer/s authority to care for the child and to exercise daily care responsibilities for this child.	Once approved, each kinship carer is provided by Care and Protection Services with a Specific Parental Authority (SPA). This gives the carer/s authority to care for the child and to exercise daily care responsibilities for this child.
GPA and SPA documents may be used as proof of care when enrolling at school, Centrelink etc.	SPA documents may be used as proof of care when enrolling at school, Centrelink etc.
Daily care and day to day parental responsibilities, consistent with a decision the chief executive would make, allows foster carers to make certain decisions about a child.	Daily care and day to day parental responsibilities, consistent with a decision the chief executive would make, allows foster carers to make certain decisions about a child.



Out of home care

Foster carers may only be registered with one out of home care agency.

Kinship carers may apply to be foster carers. An assessment and approval process must be completed before registration.

Foster carers must complete their training before placement of a child in their care.

Kinship carers are encouraged to attend training following approval as a carer.

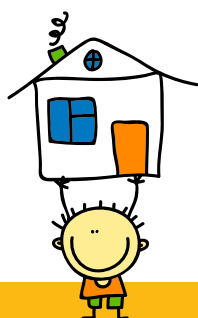
Out of Home Care Standards apply to all approved foster care arrangements.

Out of Home Care Standards apply to all approved kinship care arrangements.

How are placements decided?

Children and young people usually enter care when their safety is at risk following an investigation of a child protection report. Some children may enter care on an emergency basis, others may have a more planned arrangement.

There are a number of different types of care within a family home. Care and Protection Services will prioritise appropriate family placements for the child or young person.



'Best interests' of the child of young person

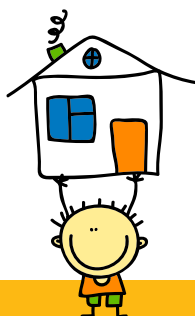
The *Children and Young People Act 2008* (the Act) provides general principles which apply to all the decisions made concerning children and young people in care and includes decisions made by carers, agency workers, Care and Protection Services workers, teachers etc.

The most important principle of the Act requires all people when making a decision about the child to consider **'the best interests of the child or young person'**.

How do I decide what is in the best interests of the child or young person?

All decisions are made by people involved in the care of a child considering their best interests. You decide what is in the best interests of a child or young person when you consider the following:

- *the views and wishes of a child or young person*
- *that the child or young person is not at risk of abuse or neglect*
- *the relationship the child has with their parent/s and others*
- *the likely effect on the child of the changes or action proposed*
- *the practicalities of maintaining contact with parents, siblings and others*
- *the parent/s attitudes to their child and their capacity to meet the needs of the child or young person*
- *for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person, the need to protect and promote their cultural and spiritual identity*
- *the need to maintain the cultural identity of children from other cultures*
- *the need for settled and stable living arrangements*
- *the need for timely decision making as delay may affect a child or young person's well being*
- *any Court order that applies to the child or young person or a family member.*



Rights and expectations

Children and young people, carers and parents have rights and expectations when involved with the out of home care system.

The Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Out of Home Care reflects basic human rights all children and young people are entitled to receive from all people.

As with the principles of the Act, decisions made concerning a child or young person in out of home care, including foster care, kinship care, residential care and other forms of care must consider how a decision respects these rights.

The Charter of Rights has ten main rights for a child or young person in care:

- The right to be safe and looked after
- The right to be respected
- The right to be treated fairly
- The right to have fun, play and be healthy
- The right to be heard
- The right to privacy and have your own things
- The right to ask questions about what is happening to them
- The right to have contact with people they care about and know about your family and cultural history

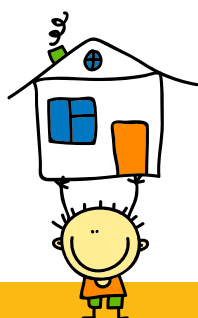
- The right to go to school
- The right to talk to people about things you don't like or don't understand.

The Charter has been developed in a way that can easily be understood by children and young people of different ages and versions were prepared for children aged 0–6, 7–12 and 13–18 years.

What do I do if a child I am caring for says I am not upholding their rights?

Firstly, listen to and discuss the concerns with the child or young person. It may be that a child misinterprets a right eg. believing you are not treating them fairly because you want them to be in bed by a certain time.

If you are unable to resolve the issue with the child or young person, contact your Out of Home Care agency/Care and Protection Services worker to discuss further and seek support in addressing the issue. Children and young people may want to talk with someone about their rights and they may contact the Children's Charter Liaison Officer on 6205 2898.



Rights and expectations

Where can I get copies of the Charter?

Copies of the Charter are available from the carer liaison officer on 6205 58357 or at: www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/act_charter_of_rights

Expectations of carers

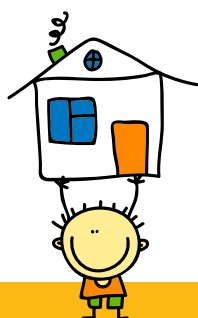
Foster carers and kinship carers may expect the following when providing care to a child or young person:

- support and information from their agency/ Care and Protection Services workers and other professionals to help carers better care for the child or young person placed in their care
- to be provided with the necessary information (including relevant medical details) about the child or young person to enable a carer to make informed decisions about whether or not to accept the placement and to effectively care for the child or young person
- participate and be included in decision making processes in such a way that carers' opinions and experiences with the child or young person are properly considered

- make certain day to day decisions about the care of the child or young person
- be informed of decisions an agency/ Care and Protection Services makes and any other information that may have an impact on the care of the child or young person
- receive a copy of the current Court order and the care plan for the child or young person in their care
- be part of the decision making process about placement information that may be given to the child or young person's parents.

What can I do if I feel I am not getting appropriate support?

Contact your agency or Care and Protection Services worker to discuss your concerns. If they are not readily available or responsive to your needs, ask to speak with their team leader or operations manager. You may also contact the carer liaison officer. Contact details are at the Carer Resources section of this Guide.



Decisions a carer can make

'Parental responsibility' is the term used for the authority, powers and duties that a parent has by law in relation to their children.

For children and young people in care, a Court order or a voluntary care agreement provides parental responsibility to certain people. In most instances this will be to the chief executive, although individual people may solely have or share this responsibility with the chief executive.

The legislation has two kinds of parental responsibility:

- daily care responsibility for the child or young person and/or
- long-term care responsibility for the child or young person.

When the chief executive has daily care responsibility, this will be delegated to a carer through a specific parental authority (SPA). Long term care responsibility may remain with the parents and if transferred to the chief executive, will only be delegated to a carer on a case by case basis.

In some instances, Court orders may share the parental responsibility between the chief executive and a parent. This means that when making decisions, the chief executive must try to consult a parent before making a decision.

Following consultation, the chief executive may agree with the parents view or make a decision the chief executive considers is more in keeping with the best interests of the child or young person.

If the chief executive has not been able to consult a parent, they should advise the parent of the decision that was made.

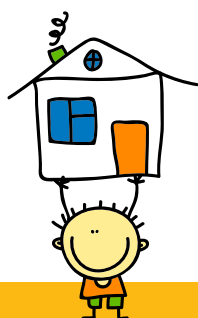
What decisions are carers authorised and not authorised to make?

Daily care responsibility allows a carer to decide on matters concerning the daily care and development of the child or young person. Remember, these decisions are made in the best interests of the child and considering their views. This will apply to children placed in care as a result of emergency action or a planned arrangement.

There are some decisions you cannot make as a carer as they are long term parental responsibility decisions and the chief executive, parents or others have the authority to make these decisions.

These are decisions that may have serious and significant impact on the child or young person.

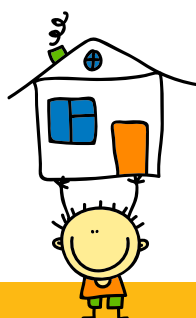
The following table provides more detail.



Decisions a carer can make

Daily care responsibility Decisions a carer may make	Long term responsibility Decisions a carer should not make (unless authority has been provided)
Home routines including meals, bedtime arrangements, clothing etc	Medical surgery or significant treatment, significant dental surgery or treatment
School lunches, uniforms, excursions, homework and meetings (parent-teacher)	Religion and religious instruction for the child or young person
Pocket money	Change of name for the child or young person
Haircuts – so long as this does not change the identity of the child	Managing a child or young person's finances or property
Who the child can be friends with, visit or have sleepovers	Arranging a passport for international travel
Short trips away, so long as planned contact is maintained	Body piercing including ear piercing and tattooing
Routine visits and treatment by the family doctor	Marriage of a young person
Routine visits and treatment by a dentist or dental therapist	Media appearance by the child or young person
Recreational activities such as sport, dancing, ballet, singing etc	Long term decisions about education, training or employment
Deciding appropriate transport arrangements, eg when to use the bus	Immunisations and the use of psychotropic medication

If you are unsure about a decision and you have the necessary time, please consult your agency worker or Care and Protection Services caseworker.



Decisions a carer can make

What if I am unsure and I must make an immediate decision in an emergency?

If you are unsure and a decision must be made immediately, consider the following:

- *Is it a decision that will save or protect the life of the child?*
- *Is the decision in the best interests of the child*
- *Have you considered the views of the child or young person (if possible).*

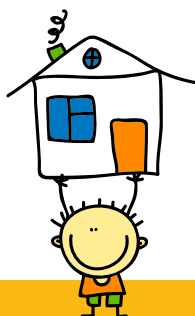
In such an instance you should notify the agency worker or Care and Protection Services caseworker immediately after you have made a decision. If a medical or other emergency arises after hours, please contact Centralised Intake and After Hours Crisis Service on 1300 556 729.

What parental responsibility do I have if the child has been placed in my care through a Family Conference Agreement?

Family group conference agreements are reached through a family group conference and the parent/s agree to transfer parental responsibility of their child to a family member or significant person. The transfer of parental responsibility cannot be to the chief executive.

The agreement should clearly indicate the type of parental responsibility being transferred. This will usually include daily care responsibility. On some occasions this may also include long term parental responsibility. If you are not certain, consult with your Care and Protection Services worker.

An agreement may be lodged with the ACT Children's Court. The Court may make an order that reflects the agreement.



Decisions a carer can make

What parental responsibility do I have if the child has been placed on an Enduring Parental Responsibility order?

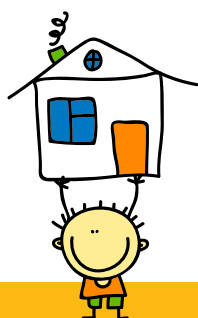
This order is made by the Court in special circumstances.

Carer/s may apply to the Court for this order after they have provided stable care for a child for at least two years in the last three years, where the child or young person expresses a view to remain in this care arrangement and where there is no likelihood of restoration of the child to the care of the parent/s. An assessment of the situation by Care and Protection Services will be required.

An Enduring Parental Responsibility order is an order allowing the carer to decide where the child will reside and make daily care and long term parental responsibility decisions until the young person is an adult (18 years).

The chief executive has no parental responsibility for the child or young person once this order is made by the Court. If a carer requires ongoing financial support, this must be agreed by Care and Protection Services during the assessment process.

Ongoing financial assistance is considered on a case by case basis.



Caring for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person

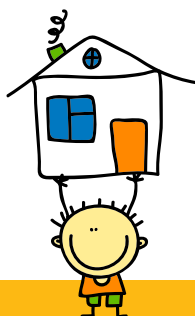
The Act requires that in addition to the principles that apply to all children and young people under the Act, specific consideration be given to the care provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT.

When making a decision, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people principle requires everyone to consider:

- the need for the child or young person to maintain a connection with their culture, lifestyle and traditions of their community
- any submissions about the child or young person made by or on behalf of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people or organisations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait traditions and cultural values (including kinship rules) of the child's family, kinship relationships and the community with which the child has the strongest affiliation.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people requiring out of home care, the Act requires that the priorities for deciding upon a placement; if available, consented by the child or young person and consistent with the cultural plan for the child or young person are:

- kinship care
- foster care with a member of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community with a relationship of responsibility in accordance with custom
- a foster carer who is a member of the child or young person's community
- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander foster carer
- a non-Aboriginal foster carer who is sensitive to the needs of the child, capable of promoting the child's ongoing contact with their family, community and culture and who lives near the child's family or community.



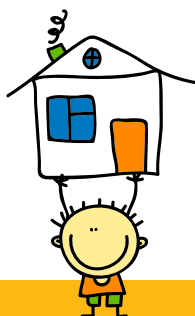
Caring for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit (within OCYFS) provides advice and is responsible for the following programs:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kinship and Foster Care Service for Aboriginal children requiring out of home care
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Program – support with other community agencies to families in the community
- Narrabundah House, a supported accommodation facility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men, with youth justice and/or care needs
- the Integrated Indigenous Service Delivery Program, supporting families in the community who may have educational, health and family support needs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit works closely with Care and Protection Services and facilitates the development of appropriate cultural plans.

Cultural plans are a requirement of the Act and they are developed to ensure those helping and supporting the child or young person preserve and maintain the culture and identity of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person in care.



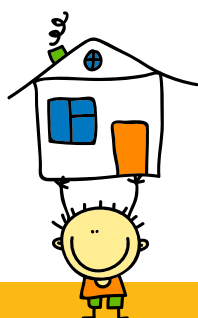
Caring for a child or young person from a different cultural background

Cultural identity, a sense of belonging within a community, is important to a child or young person who is living away from their family.

As a carer, it is important to learn and seek information about the heritage of the child placed in your care.

Carers can assist children from different cultural backgrounds by:

- gathering information about the culture and local community
- encouraging the child or young person to talk about their family and community
- promoting their participation in their community
- identifying significant people in the child or young person's life who can help maintain links with their community
- being aware of different cultural mannerisms that may affect communication.



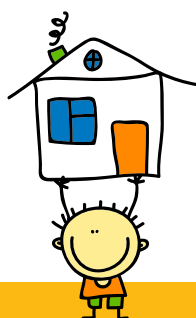
Roles and Responsibilities

for carers, Care and Protection Services and agency staff

If children and young people in care are to receive good quality care, it is important that everyone involved understands their own and each other's roles and responsibilities.

The following table outlines some core responsibilities of carers and agency/Care and Protection Services staff and shared responsibilities. While this list is not exhaustive, some responsibilities may vary on a case by case basis and depending on the stability of the placement.

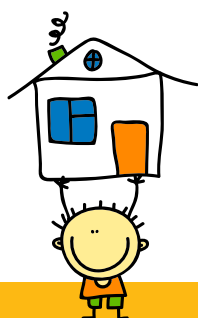
Carer roles and responsibilities	Worker roles and responsibilities	Shared roles
Provide a stable, safe and nurturing home environment that meets the needs of the child or young person	Provide information and ongoing dialogue to assist carers in their role	Ensure the placement maintains the child's safety, well being and stability
Maintain the child or young person's identity, involving them in decision making about their lives	Ensure the voice of children and young person is heard independently	Maintain the child or young person's identity
Assist the child to observe their religion (if any) and to preserve links with their cultural, racial, ethnic identity	Ensure placements are culturally appropriate	Support the child or young person's relationship with their family or community as appropriate



Roles and Responsibilities

for carers, Care and Protection Services and agency staff

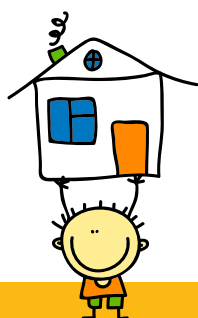
<p>Provide day to day care for the child or young person and make decisions as they arise in the best interests of the child or young person – provide appropriate consent as authorised by SPA</p>	<p>Provide timely responses to requests for permission, financial assistance or other support. Provide clarity regarding roles and responsibilities as they arise</p>	<p>Respond to the needs of the child or young person</p>
<p>Contribute to the development of the child or young person's care plan and assist in achieving the goals identified through involvement in declared care teams, review of arrangement meetings, case reviews, preparation of annual review reports and other mechanisms of review</p>	<p>Lead the development, implementation and review of the child or young person's care plan and ensure the child or young person, carers, parents and other agencies involved contribute and participate in the development of the care plan. Conduct review of arrangement meetings.</p>	<p>Work collaboratively and contribute to the development, implementation and review of the child or young person's care plan</p>
<p>Maintain confidentiality and privacy in relation to information about the child and their family</p>	<p>Ensure the child or young person and carers have appropriate information, in a way they understand to make informed decisions</p>	<p>Maintain confidentiality and privacy</p>
<p>Keep the agency/ caseworker informed of the child's progress, behavioural or other issues and significant or critical events</p>	<p>Ensure you speak with the child or young person to ensure they understand their situation and that their needs are met in the placement</p>	<p>Ensure that communication is maintained so that important information is shared in a timely way to the benefit of the child or young person</p>



Roles and Responsibilities

for carers, Care and Protection Services and agency staff

Inform the agency/ caseworker if the child or young person makes any disclosures of abuse or neglect	Investigate and assess child protection reports concerning the child or young person	Ensure the safe care and protection of the child or young person
Inform the agency/ caseworker of any significant changes or events in your family including new people in the home, significant illness, hospitalisation, death of a family member, sudden departure of a family member.	Listen and consider the impact of significant events in the carers environment upon the child or young person and provide appropriate responses to support the child and the carer. Provide feedback to carers of significant matters affecting the child in their family.	Ensure important events in the environment of the child are communicated and their impact considered
Maintain records of the child's experience in your home and assist the child in completing their Life Story Book	Listen, record and respond to information provided by carers and other agencies concerning the child or young person	Maintain appropriate records of decisions concerning the child or young person
Seek guidance from the agency or Care and Protection Services caseworker when unsure of the limitations of your role or when you experience difficulties with other agencies the child is involved with – eg. child care, school	Keep carers informed of legislative, funding changes and other significant service system issues.	Work together to support outcomes for children and young people.



Communication and information sharing

Confidentiality and privacy of the information concerning a child or young person in care is important and carers can discuss with the child or young person in their care what information should be shared with others.

To support and assist the child or young person in care, there is a need for relevant information to be shared. The *Children and Young People Act (2008)* allows for this to happen when you are performing a function under the Act and when it is in the best interests of the child or young person.

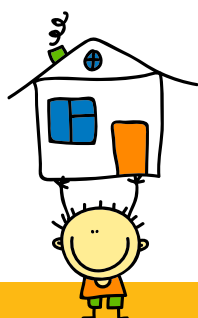
For example, you can share information with the child's school that will help the school understand what may be happening to the child. If after a contact visit the child is upset, this may provide the school with an understanding so they can plan how to address behaviours with the student at school.

Everyone that receives information pertaining to the child or young person in care becomes an 'information holder' under the Act. This means information holders have a legal responsibility to protect the information they have received and can only share the information when performing a function under the Act.

Information about a person who has made a child protection report or any information that may identify that person must not be shared. This is a requirement of the Act. Information concerning child protection reports should also be treated as highly confidential and not shared.

A carer can expect to receive the following information in relation to the child or young person in their care throughout the placement period:

- reason for coming into care and the duration of the placement, although this may change
- a copy of the current care plan, court order or voluntary care agreement
- information that has an impact on the safety and wellbeing of the child, young person or carer
- the names of the child's family and other significant people in their life
- family contact arrangements
- relevant information on the child or young person's emotional and physical health needs and medical history
- relevant educational/child care details (schooling, child care arrangements)
- routines the child or young person is used to, likes, dislikes and hobbies
- any specific behavioural issues



Communication and information sharing

- relevant contact details for the Out of Home Care agency and Care and Protection Services workers
- a copy of the latest Annual Review Report
- contact details for their worker
- a carers kit with relevant information
- a copy of the Review of Arrangements agenda and minutes.

Carers may not necessarily receive all the information about a child's family if it does not impact on the child, young person or the placement. For example, there may be reports about the parents' personal history that may not be relevant in the care and planning provided to a child. If a carer considers they need some information, please discuss this with your agency or Care and Protection Services worker.

Children and young people in care should also be provided with information concerning their placement. This is provided by the agency or Care and Protection Services worker.

This includes the members of the carers family, contact arrangements with their parents and/or siblings, contact details and arrangements when their worker will visit.

If a child or young person in care has any concerns that a carer cannot answer, the carer should encourage the child or young person to contact their worker directly or the Children's Charter liaison officer on 6205 2898.

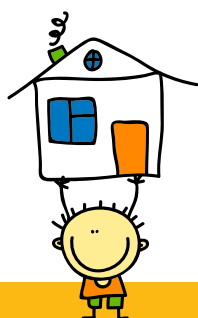
Declared care team

For some children and young people in care, a care team may have been declared with carers and representatives of agencies involved in the provision of services to the child or young person or family.

If this is the case, you would have received a signed document from Care and Protection Services indicating whom you can share information with as part of the care team.

This declaration allows members of the care team to share information in the best interests of the child or young person, regarding their safety and well being in a way that complies with the information sharing requirements of the Act.

This also helps the care team to work together and respond to issues in a timely manner. If you are not sure if a care team has been declared for the child in your care, please enquire with your agency/Care and Protection Services worker.



Communication and information sharing

Looking After Children (LAC) system

The Looking after Children (LAC) system is used by Out of Home Care agencies in the ACT to ensure that information about the child or young person's placement is recorded.

A key element of LAC is its focus on care and placement planning to identify, address and coordinate services to meet the needs of the children and young people in care.

LAC is currently used for children and young people in agency based care as a case management tool. Kinship carers are provided with a placement information sheet soon after a child is placed in their care.

The placement information sheet outlines key information that carers need to know, including details of any allergies etc. In some situations little information may be known about the child or young person. Every effort will be made by Care and Protection Services to obtain this information.

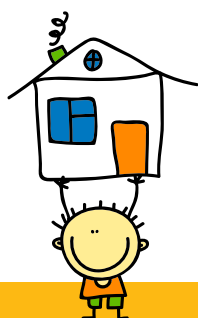
Access to information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

Information about the child, young person, their family and the carers is recorded on Care and Protection Services records. Documents are also kept by the Out of Home Care agency and these are ACT Government records.

A person, including a child or young person, may make an application to access their personal information on a record under the Freedom of Information Act 1989. Information pertaining to another person may not be provided but this may depend on the established relationship eg. carer and children in their care and each application will be determined on a case by case basis.

Before making an application it is recommended that a carer request information from their worker or team leader. If the information is not provided and you believe you are entitled to it, then you should make an application. An application is made to the Department's FOI area.

More information at www.dhcs.act.gov.au/publications/freedom_of_information or contact the Freedom of Information coordinator on 6205 0274.



Communication and information sharing

What can I tell my neighbours and friends about the child or young person placed with me?

You need to keep confidential all details about what the child has been through, why the child is in care and details of the child's family. If your neighbours are people you socialise with, who may babysit or become friends with the child in your care, it will be necessary for you to provide sufficient information for them to know how to respond in case of emergencies. This information would include advising them the child is in care and who to contact and why.

Where can I find more information on what the Act says about information sharing?

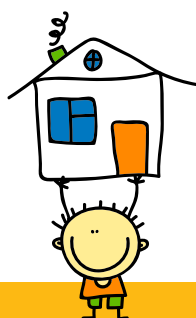
The OCYFS Information Sharing Policy and Procedure can be found at http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/41995/Information_Sharing_-_17_November_2008.pdf. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the carer liaison officer who will forward you a copy.

What information will be provided to the parents of the child?

The agency worker will provide the names and address of the child or young person's foster carer to Care and Protection Services. During the first month of placement these details will not be passed on to the child's parents and they will not be provided to the parents without the prior consent of the foster carer. A decision should be made at the first review of arrangements meeting as to how this should be managed.

When a child is placed in kinship care, the parents of the child may be aware of their child's location. This can present difficulties for kinship carers and may be a risk to the child or young person.

If the parents are not aware of the kinship carers home address, the sharing of this information will be addressed in the same way as foster carers. It is advisable that any risk issues are discussed with the Care and Protection Services worker as there are options that can be implemented to protect the care environment.



Case planning

Case planning is a process that involves decisions about the needs of a child or young person and how these will be met. A care plan should be a record of these decisions and how they will be implemented.

Case planning ensures that all those working with the child or young person and their family are involved and consulted, are clear about the goals and objectives of the interventions, the issues to be addressed and responsibility for identified tasks.

Case planning is a process that starts soon after a decision is made that Care and Protection Services will be involved in the protection of a child or young person. When a child or young person enters care, there should be a clear plan as to what will be achieved by entering care. This should be available to a carer at the time or soon after a placement is made.

The purpose of planning is to:

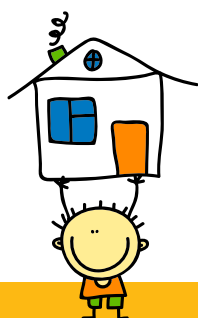
- identify the needs, strategies and resources required to meet the needs of the child or young person
- review and ensure the strategies provide the child or young person in care with stability of care

- identify and clearly articulate to workers, carer and the child's family the conditions that need to exist for the child or young person to return home when restoration is being considered
- provide an opportunity to review the child or young person's progress in care
- assist in decision making for those involved with the child or young person
- ensuring appropriate supports are in place for the permanent return of the child to their family home.

Case planning is undertaken through various processes which will vary in regularity according to the needs of the child or young person, the stability of the placement, the nature of the communication and involvement of parents, the duration and type of order or agreement. These are outlined below.

Care Planning

During the finalisation of a Court application, Care and Protection Services, in conjunction with the carer and agencies involved, will prepare a care plan to the Court.



Case planning

The care plan will advise the Court of the direction of case planning and if restoration is a goal, the conditions that will need to exist for the child or young person to be able to safely return home. This will be provided to all parties to the application.

The care plan should be provided to the carer upon completion of the Court proceedings to clarify the current goals and supports available to the child or young person and the carer.

Review of arrangements (ROA)

While the child or young person is in care, a review of arrangements meeting will be convened by Care and Protection Services every three months during the first year and less often after then, dependant on the stability of the care arrangement. The review of arrangements meeting will review the care plan, the financial, contact plans and the cultural plan where appropriate.

In foster care arrangements, the Care and Protection Services worker will be the chair and the agency worker is responsible for organising and minuting the meeting. Prior to the meeting the agency worker will prepare a report commenting on the child or young person's previous three months in care and the care plan.

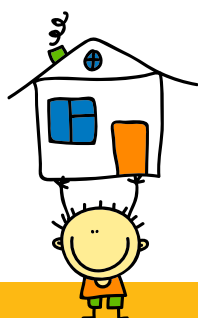
This report and the agenda to the meeting will be sent to all participants of the meeting including Care and Protection Services, the carer/s, agencies involved in supporting the child or young person and the parents.

The child or young person should be invited if he or she wishes to attend. In circumstances where it may be sensitive to include all participants together, meetings may be rearranged.

The agency is responsible for preparing the minutes of the meeting and the decisions made. Care and Protection Services are responsible for revising the care plan, the financial plan, the contact plan and the cultural plan. All these documents should be made available to the participants of the meeting.

For kinship care placements, the Care and Protection Services caseworker will be responsible for arranging and facilitating the ROA. The participants to a meeting include the child or young person, the carer/s, parents and agency representatives involved in supporting the child or young person.

Care and Protection Services are responsible for minuting the meeting, the decisions made and revising the care plan, the financial plan, the cultural plan and the contact plan. All these documents should be made available to the participants of the meeting.



Case planning

Carers should expect to be included in the care plan development and implementation, have their views listened to and considered, be consulted regarding the impact of decisions on the care environment and be informed about decisions or matters that may impact upon the child or young person.

Permanency planning

Permanency planning is planning which considers the long term goals for a child or young person in care to create stability to meet the child or young person's needs.

Permanency planning considers the future for the child, to ensure planning achieves goals that promote the stability of care for the child, in any environment.

Permanency planning may involve planning to support future care by the parents or a relative, permanent care with a carer through an Enduring Parental Responsibility order or adoption if reasonable and an option that would meet the needs of a child or young person.

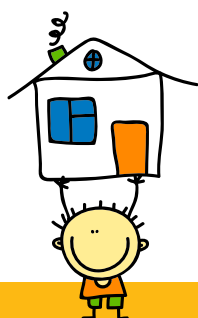
Annual Review Report

This report must be prepared each year, up to a month before the anniversary when the Court order was made. It provides the child or young person with a record of what has occurred during their year in care.

In writing the report, the Care and Protection Services caseworker should discuss the information with the child or young person in a way they will understand, the parents, carer/s, the agency worker and other significant people.

Upon completion, the report will be lodged with the Court and copies provided to the child or young person, parents, the agency worker, carers and the Public Advocate.

Carers have an important role in keeping this information safe for a child so they may access it when they can understand or want to know about what has happened in the past. These records must also remain with the child if they move to another placement.



Case planning

Restoration planning

When a child or young person enters care, restoration to the family is a priority where it is safe to do so. Care and Protection Services works with the child or young person's family to address the issues which resulted in the child or young person entering care and which, if addressed, may result in the child/young person returning home.

Restoration requires careful planning, and Care and Protection Services will develop a restoration plan with the child/young person, parents, carers, agencies and other significant people.

Restoration planning will require the gathering of information about the actions required and taken and may occur quickly or over a longer period of time. This will depend on the needs and best interests of the child or young person and the capacity of their parents to address issues that existed at the time the children came into care.

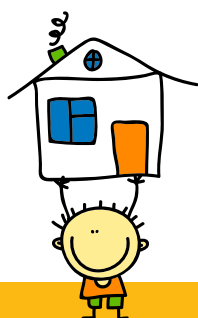
Changes of placement planning

Any changes of care arrangements while in care should be, where possible, part of a planned process, in consultation with the child or young person, their carers and those involved in supporting them.

A change of placement can be a stressful event for everyone involved. Care and Protection Services and agency workers will assist carers and the children through the process. Carers have an important part to play by supporting children and young people when they move.

Planning around the child or young person's changed care arrangements should focus on maintaining their sense of security and continuity by:

- maintaining attendance at the same school, where possible
- continuing involvement in sporting teams and special interests
- helping and encouraging the child or young person to maintain friendships
- enabling contact with previous carers, if in the best interests of the child/young person
- ensuring that the child or young person's belongings are transferred with them
- ensuring that the child or young person's cultural needs continue to be met.



Case planning

Leaving care planning

Leaving care planning refers to the planning that commences at least twelve months before the young person's care and protection order finishes, usually when the person turns 16 or 18 years of age. It is intended that future policy will commence this planning for all young people when they reach 15 years of age.

For some young people, this planning is a time of uncertainty and fear as they may not have a care arrangement they can fall back on and believe they will be alone and unsupported. Some young people find it hard to plan as they may not wish to leave their care arrangement yet they have not discussed these plans with their carers.

Other young people are eager to plan for their independence and there is a need to work through the realities and responsibilities that come with such a decision.

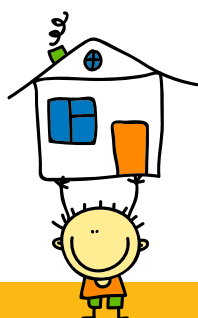
Young people need to be supported to engage with the relevant supports that will help them once they have left care. Planning also involves practical assistance such as compiling documents such as birth certificates or passports (if required) and learning skills such as cooking and budgeting.

A leaving care plan should be developed as part of the review of arrangements process. The plan is developed with the young person and others the young person considers appropriate. This should include carers who have an important role in discussing and helping young people consider their options.

Care and Protection Services may assist in meeting some initial establishment costs if a young person plans to live independently. These costs include a one-off purchase of basic items.

A young person may also be eligible for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA). This is a one-off support payment up to the value of \$1500, intended to meet some of the young person's transition costs. TILA is managed by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. More information on TILA is available at www.tila.org.au

The Act allows for aftercare assistance (financial or otherwise) to be provided to a child or young person who has left care. This is determined on a case by case basis.



Case planning

Examples of aftercare financial assistance include ongoing assistance to complete year 12, consideration of tertiary education expenses etc.

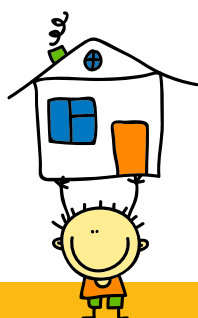
Young people and their carers should discuss the provision of assistance with their agency worker or Care and Protection Services worker during the planning process.

Can the carer discuss extra financial support during the review of arrangements?

Discussions in relation to financial matters concerning carers should be raised directly with the agency or Care and Protection Services worker as they arise.

If you are unable to contact the required persons, you may contact the carer liaison officer for assistance.

Financial matters concerning resources to meet the needs of the child or young person should be discussed at the meeting to ensure timely decisions are made.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

Safe contact between children and their families and significant people in their lives is important and is supported as a principle in the legislation. Care and Protection Services need to make every effort to maintain important relationships for the child in a way that is safe.

Contact can occur through letters, birthday and Christmas cards, telephone calls, supervised or unsupervised visits.

Contact is important because it:

- helps children maintain relationships with their family and significant people
- assists to resolve grief and loss issues for children
- assists children to better understand the reasons they are separated from their parents
- facilitates the return home of children when restoration is possible.

Contact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is a way of maintaining the culture and connection with their community and is to be encouraged where possible. If contact is in the child or young person's best interests and it is what the child wants, then it should be included in the care plan and regularly reviewed at review of arrangement meetings.

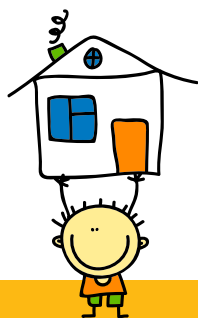
Contact arrangements that are having a detrimental and significant effect on the child or young person may be reviewed through a ROA or by Care and Protection Services.

Contact orders made by the Court must be complied with. A person may be found to be in contempt of Court if they do not follow an order of the Court. If the contact arrangements are not in the best interests of the child, Care and Protection Services need to consider the evidence and consider making an application to the Court.

On occasion, contact does not run smoothly and the following situations may arise:

- the child or young person does not want to go to the contact visit,
- a family member does not arrive and the child or young person is upset
- the carer believes the contact is harming the child or young person
- the carer feels unsafe, during contact, with the family member.

It is important for carers to speak with their worker when issues arise. There may be clear explanations as to why things have happened the way they did. It is the role of the agency or Care and Protection Services worker to discuss the situation with the child, the parents and carers and try to move forward.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

Travel expenses related to contact are included in the base subsidy rate provided to carers but may be negotiated in an exceptional case by case basis. If this is an issue, it may be raised with a worker or at a review of arrangements meeting.

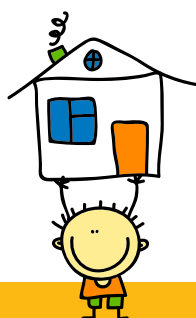
How can I make contact visits work better for the child in my care?

It is best to prepare the child for contact by speaking positively about the child's family and by not raising high expectations. Be available and willing to listen to the child before and after a contact visit and reflect on their anxieties and how they dealt with them. It is also helpful to keep a written record of the child's behaviour before and after contact, to discuss with your worker.

What if contact is cancelled?

On occasions, contact is cancelled, sometimes at the last minute. This may be for reasons out of anyone's control. This may be very disappointing for children and young people and they may express their feelings through crying, anger or withdrawal. Some children may not demonstrate immediate feelings and are only able to address their feelings at a later time.

It is important to acknowledge the feelings of the child and discuss these with them. It is important that a carer does not blame others when contact is cancelled. The carer should contact their agency or Care and Protection Services worker and discuss the effect of the cancellation with the worker and strategies to prevent future cancellations or the arrangements for the child when cancellation occurs.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

What if the carer cannot facilitate contact on a particular occasion?

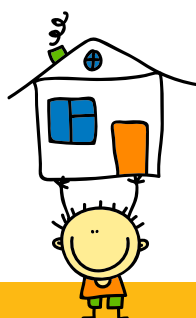
This situation may occur from time to time but should not become a regular pattern as contact between the child and family is very important. As soon as you are aware that there is a difficulty, you should contact the agency or Care and Protection Services worker. The sooner the issue is addressed, the more likely other arrangements may be made.

It may be possible to set another contact time or organise contact at a later time on the same day. Some contact arrangements, especially if a parent has travelled from interstate or contact during Christmas time may be more difficult to change. In such situations it may be necessary to arrange for another person the child trusts to supervise contact or to assist with the arrangements.

What does the carer do if a parent is making contact with the child outside the care plan arrangements?

When you become aware this may be happening, discuss this with the child or young person and consider their views and wishes. If you already know this is not a safe arrangement for the child, contact your agency worker or Care and Protection Services worker and discuss what may be done to prevent such an arrangement.

For young people who may seek out this contact, this may be an indication of the need for an improved relationship and this should be discussed and planned openly. Some young people may not be aware of the risks this poses and it is important to have strategies to address their need for increased contact with a parent or other person.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

What if the child or young person does not want to attend contact?

Some times, children will verbalise well before the contact is to occur that they do not wish to attend. This may be a way of testing whether it will be changed or it may be a clear indication they do not want to attend. It is important to speak with the child or young person about their views and also to advise your agency or Care and Protection Services worker.

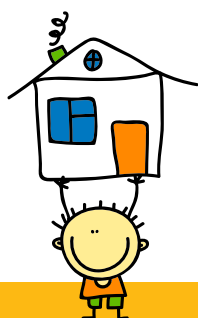
Children and young people may not verbalise their feelings and at the time contact is to occur they refuse to get into the car, they disappear or create a distraction to prevent contact from occurring. Carers should attempt to speak with the child, to focus on the positive aspects of contact and to check any concerns they have once contact has occurred.

If the child states they feel unsafe during contact or 'things' happen to them during contact, you should contact the agency or Care and Protection Services worker immediately. If they are not available, contact their team leader or operations manager.

If a child was reluctant to attend contact and then attended, it is important that carers speak with the child about the contact experience and address the concerns they had.

This may encourage future contact. If the child reports the concerns were continued, it is important to discuss these with your agency or Care and Protection Services worker to plan for future contact.

Remember, if there is a Court order specifying contact, this must occur unless an application is made to the Court to change the order. In extreme circumstances, a decision may be made to cease contact and immediately apply to the Court for a change of order.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

What if something goes wrong for the child during contact?

Planning for contact takes into consideration the risks and the possibility of an event occurring. Where there are risks, contact may not occur or supervised contact is arranged. On occasions, unexpected events happen during contact.

Once a carer is aware that something has gone wrong during contact, a carer must immediately notify their worker. A carer should not contact the parent or family member, this is a role for the agency or Care and Protection Services workers.

Contact with Care and Protection Services workers may be made at all times through the Centralised Intake and After Hours Crisis Service on 1 300 556 729.

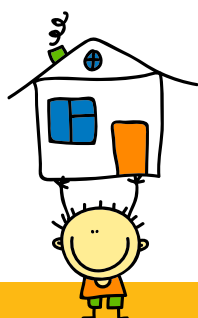
If the child has been abused or placed at risk, carers should provide all this information to the worker as it is likely the matter will be investigated. Until the investigation is complete, contact may be suspended. Police may be involved.

If a child has suffered an injury or has been sexually abused and requires immediate medical attention, a carer should take the child to The Canberra Hospital and advise their worker immediately.

At the hospital, the carer should inform the attending doctor that the child is in care and the doctor may request that a specialist doctor from the Child at Risk Health Unit become involved.

In these situations it is important that the carer supports the child, does not make negative statements about a person and remains calm. Your worker will provide you with an opportunity to discuss your feelings once the child's well being has been attended to.

If the event is less serious but has affected the safety or well being of the child or young person, it is important to contact the worker as soon as possible so this can be addressed in a planned way and contact arrangements reviewed.



Contact with family, friends and significant people

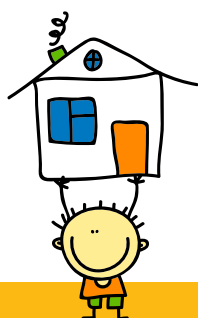
Is a carer allowed to provide additional contact?

Contact should be discussed and planned, considering the views of the child as paramount, rather than the needs of a parent. Parents should be encouraged to raise these issues with the worker and discuss them at review of arrangement meetings where they may be considered and included in a care plan.

Contact arrangements not within a care plan should not be encouraged or arranged without approval from your worker.

What if a carer has concerns about the people involved with the contact arrangements – the driver, the supervisor or the family supervisor?

The carer should raise their concerns with their worker. If this concern arises after hours and a worker is not available, in an emergency, the carer may contact the Care and Protection Services After Hours Crisis Service.



Education

Education is a vital part of a child or young person's life and provides for the development of skills which will help children when they reach adulthood. Positive educational experiences provide learning opportunities, friendships and social interactions, structure and stability.

For many children and young people in care, their education has been disrupted. Workers and carers need to give extra attention to ensure the child continues their education, has a positive experience and any difficulties are addressed quickly so they can benefit from their educational experiences.

If a carer is caring for a school age child or young person, it is important you are informed about the child's educational history, their needs and how to assist them.

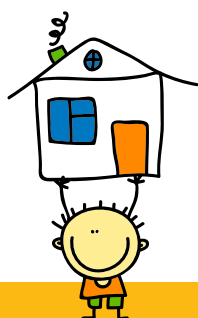
Meeting the educational needs of a child or young person is a team effort involving the carer, school and agency or Care and Protection Services workers. The team goals are to help the child or young person remain at school or in training so they can achieve their potential.

Carers play an important role to make school a positive and valuable experience for the child or young person. Carers may liaise and be closely involved with the school to address issues as they arise and gain advice about the best way to help the child or young person. Carers can also help children succeed with their homework and experience supported learning and gain confidence through this process.

All children and young people in care attending a government school will have an individual learning plan (ILP) developed to address their educational goals and needs. Care and Protection Services will notify the ACT Department of Education and Training when a child or young person is in care.

The plan will be developed by the school with the child or young person, their carer, their parents and the workers. This plan is reviewed each term to consider the progress made or to review what supports are needed to help the child or young person.

Educational achievements for the child or young person should be celebrated and recorded. These may be small steps that provide the child with a sense of achievement, a positive outlook and develop a more confident identity, experiences they may not have had previously.



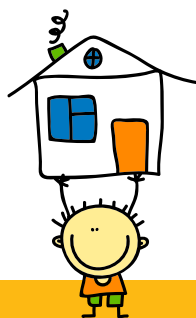
Education

Care and Protection Services, after considering the views of the child or young person, will try to keep a child or young person at their usual school and involved in the community activities they know. This provides stability and continuity and becomes important to support a restoration plan. In the best interests of some children, a change of school and new opportunities are required to help the child.

The review of arrangement meetings should discuss the educational steps taken by the child or young person and provides an opportunity for including in the care plan any extra learning support the child or young person needs.

In exceptional circumstances, consideration is given as to whether a child or young person should attend a private school. A final decision is only made by the director of Care and Protection Services, after an extensive exploration of the issues impacting on the decision.

Care and Protection Services have the authority through a long term parental responsibility order, to decide what school a child or young person attends.



What educational costs is a carer required to pay?

Children and young people attending public schools and pre-schools are only required to make a voluntary contribution. Public schools do not charge school fees. Carers may decide to make a voluntary contribution from the subsidy paid to them.

Carers are expected to cover regular school excursions. Significant costs of excursions, such as a trip to Perth or overseas, may be negotiated with their worker.

Care and Protection Services may pay for special coaching or tutoring when it is recommended and included in the care plan. It is usually provided when a child requires additional assistance or is displaying a particular skill or attribute. Approval is generally granted for a three month period and then reviewed.

Children and young people in care should be encouraged and supported to pursue interests that support their individuality, interests and connectedness to the community. This may include sporting, artistic, creative or social activities. Care and Protection Services may assist with the costs of these when they are included in the care plan.

Education

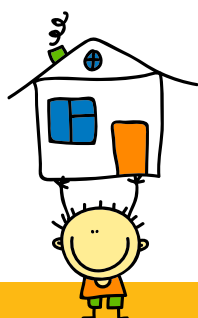
What should I do when the young person I care for has been suspended or excluded from school?

All children and young people in the ACT are required to stay at school (or an approved equivalent) until they complete year 10. Once they have completed year 10, they can choose to continue to participate in full time (at least 25 hours a week) education, or undertake approved training or employment until completing year 12 (or equivalent) or reaching 17.

If the child or young person in care is suspended from school, the school should notify the agency or Care and Protection Services worker and the carer. The school should provide access to appropriate educational opportunities during the suspension such as homework.

Before a child or young person returns to school after a suspension, there should be a meeting between the school, the child or young person, the carer and the worker to discuss reintegration back to school and strategies to prevent this from re-occurring.

Exclusion of a child from school should not occur without prior notification and discussion with Care and Protection Services. This process should also involve the young person, the carer and workers.



Health and medical care

Children and young people in care are entitled to receive a standard of care that meets their individual health, medical, optical and dental needs.

Carers are responsible for ensuring the day to day health needs of each child or young person are addressed and carers have this authority through the Specific Parental Authority granted to them by Care and Protection Services.

This authority includes taking a child to the doctor and consenting to the taking of an antibiotic or taking a child to the dentist to have a tooth cavity repaired.

Carers also have a responsibility to notify their agency or the Care and Protection Services worker if a significant accident, injury or illness involving the child or young person has occurred, where consent for treatment is required.

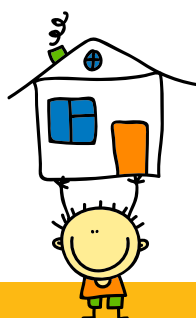
This would include a child requiring surgery to fix a broken arm, a child who is diagnosed as having Hepatitis C or a child who needs their next immunisation. Doctors may not require consent if the injuries are life threatening and urgent treatment is required.

Children or young people who have been assessed as requiring a psychotropic drug require long term parental consent. If the chief executive has this responsibility, consent must be obtained from Care and Protection Services. If the parents have retained this responsibility, the workers will seek the written consent of a parent.

A child in care will have a care plan that addresses matters concerning their health. Carers need to be provided with all the relevant information concerning the child's health to enable them to meet the child's needs.

A carer should also be aware of any current treatment that is being provided to the child. Any changes to the child's health should be discussed at the review of arrangements meeting and strategies to address the issues agreed and implemented.

A child or young person should continue to attend their own doctor where possible as this maintains the child or young person's medical history. If this is not possible, carers should take the child or young person to their own family doctor and the carer should advise the doctor that the child is in care. The doctor may wish to confirm this with the agency or Care and Protection Services worker.



Health and medical care

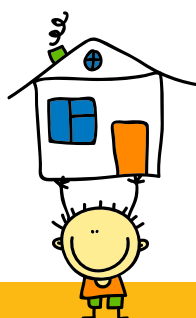
What health checks are done for the children and young people when they come into care?

Children and young people entering care should receive a health and wellbeing screen. For children aged under 14 years, the screen will be conducted by the Out of Home Care Clinic at the Child at Risk Health Unit, The Canberra Hospital. For young people aged 14 - 17 years, the screen will be undertaken at The Junction Youth Health Service in the City. If a health screen has not been done, the agency worker or Care and Protection Services worker will arrange for one to be done.

If a young person wishes to see their regular doctor for an initial health screen, this can be arranged. To ensure all areas of the screen are covered, the doctor should be advised to contact the Out of Home Care Clinic at The Canberra Hospital.

If the screen identifies the child or young person has specific health needs, a referral to a child health medical officer will be made. In complex medical matters resulting from abuse and neglect, a referral will be made to the Child at Risk Health Unit for a medical assessment.

Carers will be provided by their agency or Care and Protection Services worker with relevant information about the outcomes of the health screen. Issues needing further attention should be included and reviewed through the care plan.



Health and medical care

Can a young person consent to their own medical or dental treatment?

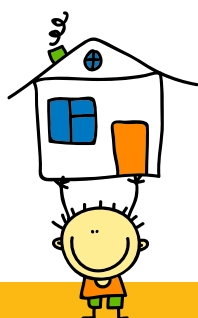
Yes. This is a matter between the doctor or dentist and the young person. The doctor may make this judgement on the basis of the maturity and understanding the young person has about the effects of the decision they may make.

For example, young people under the age of 18 may visit Sexual Health and Family Planning (SHFPACT) and begin using oral contraception. The young person may also ask that the details of their visit remain confidential and information may not be made available to carers. If you have any concerns, discuss these with your worker.

What should a carer do when the child in their care appears to need emotional or behavioural support?

Children and young people entering care may experience a range of emotional responses consistent with their history of abuse and in response to loss and separation from their parents. Counselling and therapeutic services can be arranged following a professional assessment. If a carer believes this is needed they should talk to their agency or Care and Protection Services worker.

Services are available from Government and the private sector. If a decision is made that a private practitioner is required, the costs of this treatment needs to be included in the care plan or discussed with Care and Protection Services when a more urgent response is needed.



Health and medical care

What arrangements should a carer make if a child or young person needs optical care?

If the child or young person has a treating optometrist, it is best that the child continue to be treated by this professional. If not, a child should attend the carer's optometrist.

Carers who have a Health Care Card can obtain spectacles or contact lenses for the child or young person in their care through the ACT Spectacles Subsidy Scheme. Care and Protection Services will meet the cost of prescription spectacles or contact lenses where the carer is not eligible for the ACT Spectacles Subsidy Scheme.

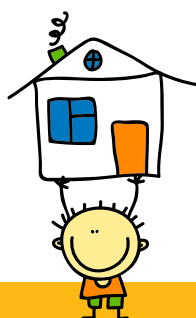
The ACT Spectacles Subsidy Scheme can be contacted on 6207 7753 or 6205 0534.

Where does a child in care obtain dental care and who pays for this treatment?

Children and young people in care should access regular dental care through the ACT Dental Health Program. The program can be contacted on 6205 0978 and has clinics based in Belconnen, Civic, Phillip and Tuggeranong Health Centres.

Dental check ups should occur every six months as arranged by the carer. If an appointment is urgently required and this cannot be obtained, the carer should contact the agency or Care and Protection Services worker to negotiate a priority consultation. If the carer chooses to take the child or young person to a private dentist and the treatment could have been obtained through the Dental Health Program, the carer is responsible for the cost.

Care and Protection Services will cover the cost of other dental treatment, such as orthodontic treatment when this is recommended by a dentist and included in the care plan. Care and Protection Services will meet the costs of all recommended surgical, medical, and dental aids and appliances where they are not available through a public health scheme.



Financial assistance available to carers

Carer subsidy and contingencies

Carers are entitled to receive a subsidy payment and may be entitled to contingency payments from the Department to assist in providing care for a child or young person. The subsidy and contingencies are not regarded as a wage or income but are provided to carers to assist them in meeting the day to day costs of caring for children and young people.

For up to date information on subsidy rates and contingency payments, carers should contact their agency or Care and Protection Services worker. The contingency guidelines provided to all carers, are currently under review. When completed, they will be accessible at www.dhcs.act.gov.au or may be requested from your worker.

Commonwealth Government Benefits

Carers may be eligible for some Centrelink benefits. Carers may provide their General Parental Authority (GPA) and Specific Parental Authority (SPA) as evidence to Centrelink they are caring for a child or young person. Your agency or Care and Protection Services worker can provide additional information to Centrelink.

For further assistance or information on any of the following Commonwealth Government Benefits call 13 6150 or visit www.familyassist.gov.au

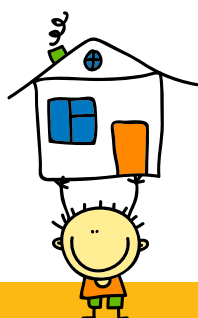
Family Assistance - Family Tax Benefit A and B

Carers may be eligible to claim a Family Tax Benefit Part A and B for children or young people placed in their care. Family Tax Benefit Part A is designed to help families with the costs of care of children, assessed on the combined family income and paid per child.

Family Tax Benefit Part B gives additional assistance to families with one main income, including single parent families. Payment is based on the age of the youngest child and is subject to an income test. The foster care subsidy is not considered taxable income for Family Tax Benefit purposes.

Child Care Benefits

Child Care Benefits assist with the cost of approved or registered child care including long day care, family day care, occasional care, outside school hours care, vacation care and registered care. Grandparents with primary care of their grandchildren may be entitled to extra assistance with the costs of approved child care.



Financial assistance available to carers

Parenting Payment

Carers may be eligible for the Parenting Payment. This payment is made to a single carer with at least one child under eight years of age in your care or partnered with at least one child under six in your care. Registered and active carers are exempt from the work requirements for this payment.

Maternity Payments

These are one-off payments to assist with the costs of newborn or very young children. In some instances carers may be eligible for the baby bonus or the Maternity Immunisation Allowance. The baby bonus is paid to families following the birth or adoption of a baby and recognises the extra costs associated with caring for very young children.

The Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a one-off payment made to parents/ carers for children who have been fully immunised at 18 months, or after 18 months, but before their second birthday.

Health Care Cards

Children and young people in care can gain access to concessions under a Health Care Card, in the following ways:

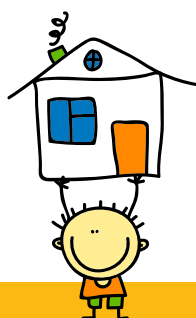
- all children and young people in out of home care are able to have a Health Care Card in their name
- where carers are eligible for a Health Care Card, the child or young person may be included on that card as a dependant.

Your worker will provide you with the necessary advice to obtain a Health Care Card from the Family Assistance Office, for a child or young person in your care.

A Health Care Card issued in the child or young person's name is valid for a period of six months. If the child or young person moves from your care, the carer must notify the Family Assistance Office.

Pharmaceutical Benefits

If a carer or children or young people in care need to buy medicines regularly, you may benefit from the Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme (PBS). Under the PBS, if you hold a Health Care Card, you will pay a small amount per prescription. For further information contact your pharmacist or call 1800 020 613.



Financial assistance available to carers

Medicare benefits

Medicare covers all children and young people in care. If the child or young person is in short term care, the carer will be provided with a Medicare number for that child or young person. Where a child or young person is in long term care they may be enrolled on the carer's Medicare Card. When a young person reaches 15 years they may obtain a Medicare card of their own.

Carers who have private health insurance may arrange to have the child or young person included in their insurance, following consultation with the agency or Care and Protection Services. Care and Protection Services will pay the gap costs of treatments not fully covered by the health fund when this has been included in the care plan.

Carer Payment and Carer Allowance

The Carer Payment is made to people who provide constant care for a "profoundly disabled" child or young person under 16 years. An income and assets test applies. The Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment for those providing care at home for a child or young person with a disability. For more information, contact your local Centrelink Office on 13 2317.

Youth Allowance

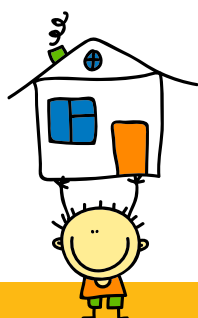
Youth Allowance is available to young people aged between 16 and 24 years (15 if independent) who are studying full-time or undertaking an apprenticeship. The youth allowance is also available to young people aged 16 to 20 years (15 if independent) who are looking for work or who are training and doing part time work. For more information, contact your local Centrelink Office on 13 2317.

Abstudy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are studying an approved secondary course may be entitled to receive Abstudy. Primary school students aged under 14 years of age, in some circumstances, may also qualify. For more information, contact your local Centrelink Office on 13 2317.

Insurance Claims

Carers may be entitled to reimbursement for property damage or personal injury incurred by a child or young person in their care. Approved claims of up to \$1000 may be reimbursed as a contingency payment upon submission of a claim. For claims over \$1000, an insurance quote may be required. Carers should discuss a claim for reimbursement with their agency or Care and Protection Services worker.



Leaving care

Leaving care planning refers to planning that commences at least twelve months before the young person's care orders finish, usually when the person turns 16 or 18 years of age. It is intended that future policy will commence this planning for all young people when they reach 15 years of age.

For some young people, this planning is a time of uncertainty and fear as they may not have a care arrangement they can fall back on and believe they will be alone and unsupported.

Some young people find it hard to plan as they may not wish to leave their care arrangement yet they have not discussed these plans with their carers. Other young people are eager to plan for their independence and there is a need to work through the realities and responsibilities that come with such a decision.

When young people turn 18 years of age or their care order lapses they may:

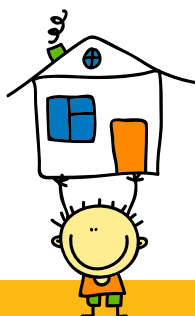
- remain living with their carers
- live with their parents
- transition to semi-independent or independent accommodation
- share accommodation with other young people
- receive ongoing care in a Disability ACT funded program.

Young people need to be supported to engage with the relevant supports that will help them once they have left care. Planning also involves practical assistance such as identification documents (eg. birth certificates or passports), learning skills (eg. cooking, budgeting), opening bank accounts etc.

A leaving care plan should be developed as part of the review of arrangements process with the young person and others the young person considers appropriate. This should include carers, who have an important role in discussing and helping young people consider their options.

Young people leaving care have the right to feel they are sufficiently prepared for this transition stage.

Being prepared involves being well informed or knowing where to go to get appropriate information and support; have the necessary documents for identification such as a birth certificate or passport; have developed living skills; have confidence in managing their future and being confident of the decisions they make and having a contact point in case they need advice or assistance.

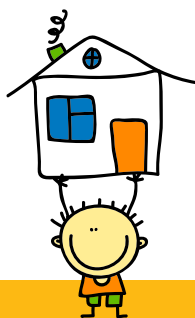


Leaving care

Preparing for these changes is a shared responsibility of those involved in supporting the young person.

The leaving care plan should consider:

- personal needs (clothing, furniture etc)
- living arrangements (Housing ACT, bonds etc)
- education, training or employment (cost of education or employment)
- health (Medicare card, counselling, dental care etc)
- interests and hobbies
- assistance with legal or financial matters
- lessons to obtain a driver's licence
- financial support (Centrelink, Transition to Independent Living Arrangement (TILA) funds, financial assistance by Care and Protection Services)
- support networks and referrals as necessary
- after-care assistance and support.



Allegations against carers

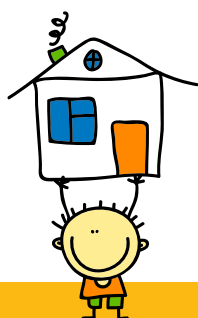
From time to time Care and Protection Services receive child concern reports that allege a foster carer or kinship carer, or another member of their family, has abused or neglected a child or young person in their care.

These reports are referred to as 'allegations of abuse in care.' Care and Protection Services, under the Children and Young People Act 2008, has a responsibility to receive, record and assess all child concern reports and determine what appropriate action is required.

Care and Protection Services may consider a range of responses including no further action, referral and support, ongoing case management or appraisal.

Reports that allege that a carer has abused or neglected a child or young person in their care occur for many reasons. Examples include misinterpretation of the actions of a carer by others; actions taken to protect a child or young person from harm; and disciplinary methods being used by carers that may be considered by others as abuse or neglect.

Sometimes reports have no foundation. On other occasions, children and young people have been harmed in all environments. For this reason, reports made about a child or young person in care must be considered and decisions made concerning the best interests of the child or young person.



Allegations against carers

What happens when a report is made?

When Care and Protection Services receive a report that makes allegations of abuse or neglect by carers, Care and Protection Services undertakes an initial assessment, including a risk assessment of all child concern reports, to decide if, when and how they will respond.

What Care and Protection Services does is dependant on many factors as the circumstances of every child or young person are different. An appraisal by Care and Protection Services and/or a police investigation may follow the initial assessment.

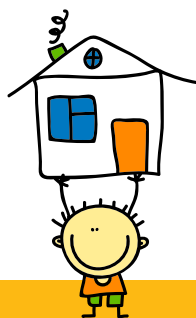
Care and Protection Services policy requires that reports where allegations of non-accidental injury or sexual abuse of children are made are referred to police. Care and Protection Services will be advised by police how they will proceed regarding an alleged criminal offence. Care and Protection Services will determine when an appraisal is required.

Police may also be informed first of the allegations made about a carer towards a child in care. In such instances, police will advise Care and Protection Services and joint planning will occur. On occasions, the police may commence a criminal investigation and request that Care and Protection Services delay an appraisal.

What are the carers responsibilities?

While we accept that this is a difficult situation to be in, it is the carer's responsibility to:

- *be available for interview if required*
- *cooperate with the process*
- *be open and honest when asked for information and*
- *support the child or young person, where they can, during and after the appraisal.*



Allegations against carers

What happens to carers if Care and Protection Services decides not to appraise a report?

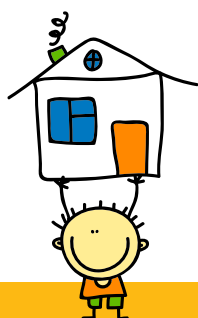
When Care and Protection Services receive a report about a child or young person in care, an initial assessment is made and the caseworker and team leader decide on the appropriate course of action, including any immediate action. A decision may be made that no intervention is required.

In circumstances where the child is in foster care and follow up is necessary but not an appraisal, Care and Protection Services may contact the foster care agency and discuss how the issues will be managed.

In these circumstances the foster care agency may discuss the report with the carer(s), and/or the person against whom the allegation is made and provide a report to Care and Protection Services about what was discussed.

In circumstances involving kinship carers or carers managed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Services Unit the same process may apply, although this would be undertaken by Care and Protection Services workers or in conjunction with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit worker.

An example of when this process may be implemented is when a carer is alleged to have used inappropriate discipline. A discussion of disciplinary strategies used by the carer and their impact on children may take place.



Allegations against carers

What happens when a decision is made to appraise a report?

Once a decision is made to appraise a report, Care and Protection Services must inform the Public Advocate of the report as this is required under the Children and Young People Act 2008. Care and Protection Services also has a responsibility to discuss the decision to appraise, where appropriate, with the parents of the child or young person.

This decision is taken considering the views and best interests of the child or young person. Care and Protection Services may advise parents of the outcome of the appraisal when completed.

When an appraisal is to take place, an appraisal action plan is developed by Care and Protection Services. This will be done in conjunction with the agency or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit. This plan may be reviewed during the appraisal process.

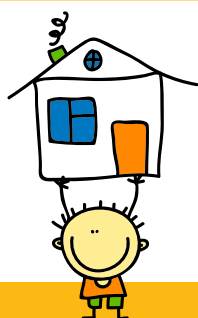
In consultation with the agency or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit (if appropriate), Care and Protection Services may decide to place the child in another placement (temporarily or permanently), or may ask the person against whom the allegation is made to leave or not visit the home.

If there are other children in the home, the risk of abuse or neglect to those children will also be part of the assessment and appraisal process.

If a decision is made to move the child to another placement during the appraisal, Care and Protection Services will explain the reasons to the carer. How much information is shared will be determined on a case by case basis, including the circumstances of the child and the nature of police involvement.

A carer's General Parental Authority (GPA) and/or Specific Parental Authority (SPA) may be suspended while the appraisal is taking place. If this happens, the carer will not be able to care for any child or young person whom the chief executive has parental responsibility for or any community placement through their agency.

The parents of the child or young person are informed of decisions made about the placement of their child or young person.



Allegations against carers

Why do the police become involved?

The law allows Care and Protection Services to refer to police allegations of physical or sexual abuse in relation to a child or young person. These are criminal offences and police determine if they are investigated.

Care and Protection Services also refers to police reported concerns of domestic or family violence and serious neglect, as these are also criminal acts. Police must report incidents of physical and sexual abuse to Care and Protection Services as part of their mandatory reporting obligations.

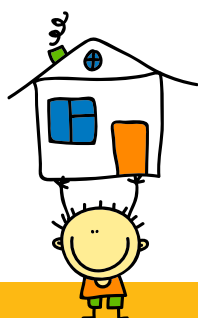
Police will make a decision about whether they will investigate allegations or not. The decision will depend on a range of factors; what sort of physical or sexual abuse is alleged to have occurred and what evidence there is to support the allegation.

If the police decide to investigate, the police and Care and Protection Services, where possible, may interview the child or young person together.

When the report alleges that a carer has abused or neglected a child or young person, Care and Protection Services and the police will usually meet and speak with the child or young person about the allegations without their carer present.

This may happen before they speak with the carer or any other adult involved. This can be difficult for carers to understand, however, it is important that the child or young person is interviewed independently and in a safe environment about the reported incident.

Police interviews with a carer are not usually done in the presence of Care and Protection Services. Often, the police will need to interview the carer before Care and Protection Services. Police will advise the carer of the allegation when they interview them. If allegations involve more than one carer, separate police interviews may take place.



Allegations against carers

Why do the police become involved? (continued)

Carers may seek to obtain legal advice or have a legal representative present during a police interview. Police may charge a person if they believe there is sufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a criminal act may have occurred.

Care and Protection Services are responsible for ensuring the safety of children. Care and Protection Services will undertake a separate appraisal of allegations of concern even when the police have not charged a person.

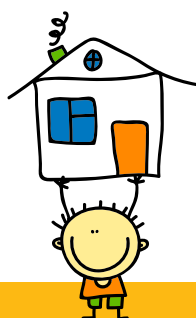
Care and Protection Services may substantiate an allegation when there is a likelihood abuse or neglect has or is occurring to a child or young person (on the balance of probabilities) and the child or young person's safety and wellbeing is at risk, or is likely to be at risk, in the future.

What information will carers be given about the process?

During an appraisal or a police investigation, the carer will be advised of the allegations made concerning them. How soon this will occur depends on the appraisal/investigation process. If the police investigate the allegation, carers may only be given limited information until police inquiries have been completed.

Lack of information can be very hard for carers. Care and Protection Services and the agency are guided by the police during a criminal investigation.

Care and Protection Services will discuss the allegations with the carer during the appraisal process and keep the carer(s) informed, through the agency or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service unit (if appropriate) as the appraisal progresses.



Allegations against carers

What happens following an appraisal?

There are several possible outcomes of an appraisal. The appraisal may confirm that the allegations are unfounded, there is no evidence to support the allegations and the allegations are unlikely to have occurred. These allegations are unsubstantiated.

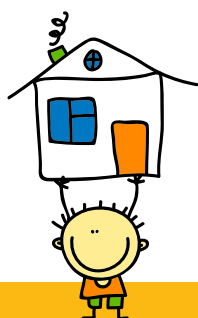
An appraisal may also confirm that the allegation/s were likely to have occurred, there is evidence consistent with the allegations made and the allegations are substantiated. An appraisal may also raise concerns that may be addressed through the ongoing case management process and a revised care plan.

Following appraisal, a report will be provided to the Care and Protection Services placement manager for consideration.

The senior manager, Care and Protection Services, the placement manager, the Care and Protection Services caseworker and the agency or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service unit (if appropriate) will meet, discuss and determine what should happen about the child or young person's ongoing placement with the carer and the carer's General Parental Authority and/or Specific Parental Authority. The child or young person's care plan is also reviewed.

Following this meeting, the carer(s) will be informed in writing by Care and Protection Services, through their agency or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service unit or directly, of the outcome of the appraisal and the decisions made.

If it is decided that the carers General Parental Authority and/or the Specific Parental Authority will be withdrawn, the placement manager will prepare the necessary documentation.



Allegations against carers

What rights do I have as a carer?

Carers can expect that the safety of the child or young person is the paramount concern Care and Protection Services will have when a report is made about a child or young person in care. All reports of allegations in care are taken seriously.

Carers have a right to be supported during the process, including the appraisal process. Carers may also wish to seek legal advice.

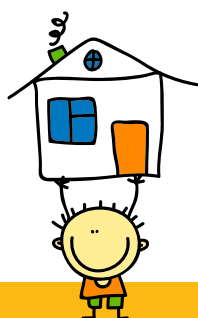
The agency worker will provide support to foster carers and the carer liaison officer may support kinship carers. Staff from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit will support their carers.

Carers may contact the Foster Care Association, the Grandparents and Kinship Care Association and the broader range of support and advocacy agencies for assistance. Contact your worker or the carer liaison officer to find out who can assist you.

Carers can expect to be treated fairly and with respect by Care and Protection Services when an allegation is made. The initial investigation and any appraisal process are necessary steps and no personal judgments are made about the carers.

Carers have a right to be advised of the following by Care and Protection Services:

- *that the allegation against them has been made and is being appraised*
- *the nature of the allegations made that concern them*
- *what will be the appraisal process*
- *the time frame for a Care and Protection Services response to the allegation*
- *who is available to support them during the appraisal, including debriefing and counselling services to help with the situation*
- *the provisions in place for the child or young person in their care during the appraisal process*
- *a written explanation were an authority to care for children or young people has been revoked*
- *the carer's right to appeal a decision*
- *access to the Employee Assistance Program.*

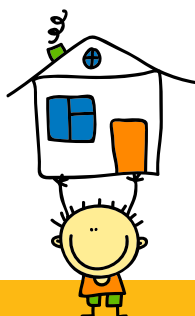


Allegations against carers

What are the appeal processes?

The decision to revoke a carer's authorities (GPA and SPA) to care for children and young people in the care of the chief executive is a reviewable decision. This may be reviewed by senior management within the Department and/or by an application to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

*Foster carers and kinship carers are entitled to make a complaint to the Department. This is managed as outlined in the Department's Complaint Management and Feedback Guide available at www.dhcs.act.gov.au/complaints_and_advocacy
Carers may also seek advice from the carer liaison officer.*



Resources for carers

Resources available for carers are broad and diverse across the ACT community as they include services in the community available to all residents.

There are also services available for families needing support through the Child and Family Centres at Gungahlin and Tuggeranong and a further centre in Belconnen to open in late 2010.

In the Guide we mention services that are specifically focused on the role of carers for children and young people in care. The carer liaison officer may provide carers additional advice on a range of community supports and services.

Foster Care Association ACT (FCA)

The Foster Care Association of the ACT offers support and provides information to foster or kinship carers in the ACT. The organisation is run by volunteers (mostly carers) and is linked to the National Foster Care Association.

The aim of the Foster Care Association is to improve the circumstances of foster and kinship care families and the children and young people they are caring for.

The roles of the Association include:

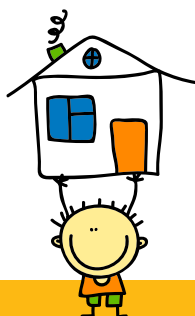
- provide training to carers
- provide support and information to carers
- assist Government in the formulation of policy
- advocate for the rights of children and young people in care and the families caring for them.

The FCA has a phone line for information and support and a website which offers a range of useful information including:

- the current focus and how carers can have their say
- information on new training programs and conferences
- the LAC website
- a list of payment and subsidy rates
- comprehensive information on the roles and responsibilities of those included in the 'Corporate Parent'
- links to the Office for Children Youth and Family Support documents, policies and resources
- hot topics
- useful and relevant website links.

www.fcaact.org.au

T: 6232 1822



Resources for carers

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program is run by Marymead Child and Family Centre.

The program provides information and support to grandparents raising grandchildren, whether this is an outcome of Care and Protection Services intervention or caring for children through an informal agreement with the parents.

Monthly meetings are held at:

Marymead
255 Goyder Street
Narrabundah

T: 6162 5872

Grandparent and Kinship Carers (ACT) Incorporated

The Grandparent and Kinship Carers Association provides advice, support and assistance to people caring for relative children and young people.

For more information, email:
grandship@live.com.au

CREATE Foundation

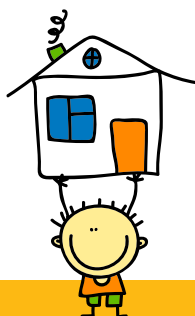
CREATE Foundation is a national not-for-profit organisation run by, with and for, children and young people in any type of care throughout Australia. CREATE aims to ensure all children and young people in care are afforded the same life opportunities as other young Australians.

CREATE is the only organisation of its kind in Australia. CREATE runs programs and services to:

- connect children and young people to each other
- empower and resource children and young people in care
- change the care system from the inside through the participation of children and young people themselves.

Some of the activities/programs run by CREATE include:

- a magazine written for and by young people in care
- a club for young people that sends out a newsletter and birthday cards
- leadership and development courses for 14-18 year olds
- a consulting program that employs and trains young people as trainers and consultants with CREATE



Resources for carers

- a report twice a year on the status of children and young people in care
- training programs to assist adults involved in direct service delivery, including government policy makers, workers, community workers and educators.

Carers can support children and young people in care to get connected to CREATE by:

- sharing and passing on information you receive from CREATE
- encouraging children and young people to join Club CREATE
- inviting workers from the nearest CREATE centre to visit
- participating in CREATE programs and events.

For more information 1800 655 105
www.create.org.au

ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

The carer liaison officer advocates and supports carers in their role.
Contact 6205 2856 or
carerliaisonofficer@act.gov.au.

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

The Office for Children, Youth and Support assists children, young people, parents, carers and agencies to ensure the healthy development of children and young people, safe from abuse and neglect.

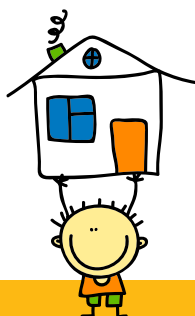
The Office has five sections including Early Intervention and Prevention, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit, Youth Directorate, Strategic Partnerships and Care and Protection Services.

Care and Protection Services are divided into three main areas:

Operations, Integrated Court Unit (Court matters) and the Practice Support Unit (Policy).

There are three teams in Operations:

- Centralised Intake Service and the After Hours Crisis Service (CIS)
1300 556 729
- Response and Intervention Team (RIT) 62071466
- Children on Orders Team (COT)
62071069



Resources for carers

Out of Home Care agencies

There are five out of home care agencies in the ACT. The agencies providing foster care services include:

Barnardos

PO Box 384
Dickson 2602

6228 9500

www.barnardos.org.au

Galilee

PO Box 205
Mawson 2605

T: 6290 2191

www.galilee.org.au

Marymead

PO Box 4260
Kingston 2604

T: 61625854

www.marymead.org.au

Life Without Barriers

PO Box 689
Mitchell

T: 6129 7200

www.lwb.org.au

Agencies that provide other forms of care include:

Richmond Fellowship

PO Box 83
Curtin 2605

T: 62486118

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Resources

The following agencies are some of the community resources available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

For more information, contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit on 6205 4798.

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

PO Box 307
Erindale Centre

T: 62319555

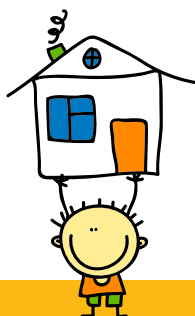
E: kin@gugan-gulwan.com.au

Winnunga Nimmityah Aboriginal Health Service

63 Boolimba Crescent
Narrabundah

6284 6220 or 6284 6222 (clinic)

E: julie@winnunga.com.au



Resources for carers

South Eastern Aboriginal Legal Centre

GPO Box 434
Canberra ACT 2601

T: 6231 9555

Boomanulla Aboriginal Sport and Recreation

63 Boolimba Crescent
Narrabundah

T: 6295 8557

E: boomanullaoval@optusnet.com.au

Jabal Centre (support for students)

Australian National University
Acton

T: 6232 2423

E: jabal.centre@anu.edu.au

Yarauna Centre (support to CIT students)

F Block
CIT Campus
Constitution Ave
Reid

T: 6207 3309

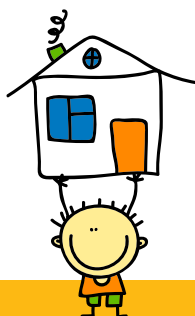
www.cit.edu.au/yurauna

Wreck Bay Council

T: (02) 4442 1195

Wreck Bay Medical Centre

T: 4442 1130



Complaints and Review Processes

The ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support seeks your feedback on the quality and effectiveness of services, programs and policies.

There may be a time when carers are dissatisfied with the level of service they receive from an agency or the Office and may wish to lodge a complaint. All funded agencies have guidelines setting out the way in which complaints are managed.

Before lodging a formal complaint carers should try and resolve the matter directly with the agency or Care and Protection Services by discussing the issues with the worker or their team leader.

If the matter is not resolved at this level, carers may ask to speak with the carer liaison officer, the operations manager or senior manager in Care and Protection Services.

There may be times when carers do not agree with a decision or actions taken by Care and Protection Services regarding the child or young person in their care.

In these circumstances the person affected by a decision may seek to have the decision or action reviewed.

There are other review processes where issues may be raised. If these have not resolved an issue or are unsuitable, carers may talk to the operations manager, the senior manager, Care and Protection Services or the director, Care and Protection Services.

Carers may also wish to make a written complaint to the executive director of the Office, or to the Consumer, Advocacy and Quality Service, an independent complaints resolution service in the Department.

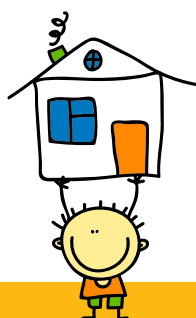
A complaint may also be lodged online at OCYFS@act.gov.au or dhcs@act.gov.au or at www.dhcs.act.gov.au/complaints_and_advocacy/client_feedback_form

Carers may also wish to make a complaint to a statutory agency:

The Public Advocate of the ACT
E: pa@act.gov.au
T: 62070707

The ACT Ombudsman
E: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au; or

The ACT Human Rights Commission
E: ACTkids@act.gov.au



Information in this document is correct at the time of printing, and may change from time to time.

For enquiries regarding any of the information, please contact the:

Carer Liaison Officer
Consumer Advocacy and Quality Service
ACT Department of Disability, Housing
and Community Services
GPO Box 158
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone 6205 8357 or email
carerliaisonofficer@act.gov.au.
www.dhcs.act.gov.au

Comments that would improve future versions of this Guide are also most welcome and may be forwarded to the carer liaison officer.

