

Module three: Early days in a placement

Handouts for participants

Exercise on Principles of the Child Protection Act

Foster carers must “understand and be committed to” the principles outlined in this session. The principles reflect certain values about families, the community, and the role of the state in intervening in the lives of families. Our values about families and the community come from a range of sources - personal experience, our education, our culture, our religious and spiritual beliefs.

- Do your values about families sit comfortably with the principles of the *Child Protection Act*? Give actual examples where possible from within your own family or family of origin.
- Are there any conflicts or concerns between these principles and your own point of view?

Statement of Standards - Examples of meeting the standards

- The following table is for learning and development purposes only and is not a set of performance indicators in relation to carers/services meeting the Standards.
- It is acknowledged that carers and employees are constantly striving to ensure that the care they provide meets the Statement of Standards.
- The provision of care to children who require placements for protective reasons is a complex and difficult task. Some foster carers and employees will have the experience, the training and the resources to meet the standards; others may require developmental support and other resources.
- Ensuring that the care environment is a quality environment is the responsibility of all stakeholders – not just carers or licensed care service employees and requires a proactive approach to the support, training and developmental needs of carers and licensed care service employees.

Statement of Standards - Quality Care

Standard	Examples
a) The child's dignity and rights will be respected at all times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide favourite and age-appropriate toys, books and clothes. • Ensure clear communication; understand need for different styles of communication, age-appropriate communication. • Ensure personal, physical and information privacy. • Facilitate child/young person's participation in decision making. • Allow for individuality / preferences. • Foster child to be treated with respect and dignity – minimise any sense of stigmatisation.
b) The child's needs for physical care will be met, including adequate food, clothing and shelter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide nutritional food. • Ensure special dietary needs are met. • Provide appropriate bedding, clothing.
c) The child will receive emotional care that allows him or her to experience being cared about and valued and that contributes to the child's positive self regard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that language is warm, caring and responsive. • Model appropriate conflict resolution. • Provide consistent discipline (not punishment). • Build rapport, have 'special' time with individual children. • Acknowledge/celebrate achievements and

	<p>positives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist child / young person to understand individual differences and to positively resolve differences and cope with making mistakes. • Enable child to have a positive experience of family life.
<p>d) The child's needs relating to his or her culture and ethnic grouping will be met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate respect for different beliefs and multi-cultural or indigenous orientation. • Work with appropriate agencies eg recognised agency regarding case plans and placement agreements. • Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact with extended family. ○ Contact with and participation in indigenous children's services – ensure child experiences their own language and culture. ○ Contact with church groups, elders. ○ Observation of cultural/religious events.
<p>e) The child's material needs relating to his or her schooling, physical and mental stimulation, recreation and general living will be met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ school materials ○ library materials ○ computer resources ○ exhibitions. • Provide an appropriate homework environment. • Pay sports fees. • Encourage children / young people to participate in appropriate social, recreational activities and hobbies. • Organise transport to activities. • Provide pocket money and the opportunity to spend their money on items of their choice, as appropriate.
<p>f) The child will receive education, training or employment opportunities relevant to the child's age and ability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange access to play group, pre-school or school. • Encourage child's attendance at school, emphasise the importance of education. • Attend parent/teacher interviews, when required.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for tutoring where needed. • Support young person in attending volunteer work, TAFE, apprenticeships, university or employment. • Recognise and encourage appropriate interests and advocate accordingly. • Support young person in attending career days. • Work with department and other agencies regarding specific Transition From Care case plans.
<p>g) The child will receive positive guidance when necessary to help him or her to change inappropriate behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of positive reinforcement. • Ensure clear and appropriate consequences for behaviour. • Help child / young person to problem-solve. • Model appropriate conflict resolution, anger management techniques. • Demonstrate appropriate knowledge of child development. • Facilitate child / young person having normal childhood experiences.
<p>h) The child will receive dental, medical and therapeutic services necessary to meet his or her needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure child / young person has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ regular dental appointments ○ medical attention in response to sickness ○ any necessary inoculations ○ physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology, speech therapy or behavioural therapy appointments, if required (maybe required as part of case plan) ○ specialist input re issues such as bed wetting. • Advocate for required therapies or services. • Work with therapists or counsellors, as appropriate.
<p>i) The child will be given the opportunity to participate in positive social and recreational activities appropriate to his or her developmental level and age.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure child / young person experiences a range of opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attending a friend’s birthday party ○ Going on outings ○ Going on walks or to the beach ○ Listening to music

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cooking ○ Playing team sport ○ Joining a social group ● Encourage and provide access to individual interests/
<p>j) The child will be encouraged to maintain family and other significant personal relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact visits ○ Telephone calls ○ letters and e-mail ○ drawings ○ life books ○ photo albums ● Ensure any comments about the child's family are appropriate and that consideration and respect are given to the child's family.
<p>k) If the child has a disability - the child will receive care and help appropriate to the child's special needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek assistance / information in relation to child's specific needs. ● Joint relevant support group. ● Advocate for additional external resources / services. ● Work with departmental worker and local resource services on case plan.

Crucial Role of Education

- Research is clear that involvement in school life can provide much more than educational qualifications: it can contribute to confidence, self esteem and the development of life skills, thereby promoting resilience in children and young people.
- Too often children in care have experiences before they come into care that can result in under achievement at school. They may have changed schools often resulting in further disruptions and have developed a cycle of low achievement and low self esteem which results in poor academic achievement.

Some ways that carer's can promote educational support are:

- Helping with homework – discuss it, create the right atmosphere, make study space available, encourage study planning, and encourage literacy skills by reading at home.
- Finding out what is available for the child at school – subject choices, extra curricular help, parent/child sessions.
- Encouraging effort – stay in touch with class teachers. Take photos of school activities, give rewards for effort, involve CSO's and the child's family.
- Reading all reports from the child's school and discuss them with the child. Attend parent teacher evenings.
- Encouraging the child to take part in extra –curricular activities at school and participate in these where possible yourself eg plays, sports, music.
- Involving others in this – eg CSO – and advocate for funding if necessary for things like tutoring, sporting fees, music lessons.
- Trying to convince children of the importance of achievement – and make educational activities fun.

Carer's role in Educational Support Plans

- Educational Support Plans will be made for every child in care, to ensure that educational needs are positively addressed. This recognises the important role of both Queensland Education and Department of Child Safety in ensuring that children in care are provided with opportunities to reach their full potential. It should be a positive outcome for all children and young people in care.
- Foster carers will play a pivotal role in ensuring a child or young person understands the process and views it in a positive light. They will participate in the planning with both Departments, and assist a child or young person to participate fully in the process.
- If a carer is aware that the child or young person may be feeling anxious about this process it is important to inform the child's worker.

For more information about Education Support Plans, visit

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/foster-care/children-and-young-people/info-kit-for-children-and-young-people-in-care/education-support-plan-esp>

Ways to assist in connecting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child

- When an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person meets another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, they share a common experience and intuitively understand the life-style and value characteristic of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander society.
- It is important to understand the different value systems between indigenous and non – indigenous people, to be able to appropriately engage with people from other cultural backgrounds.
- Whether we are talking about children and young people from the Torres Straits, Northern Territory or Brisbane in Queensland. In making connections with them, one must take into consideration that these children and young people **may** (*remember not to stereotype*) come from backgrounds, which are non-competitive, non-individualistic and non-materialistic.
- Start a conversation that begins with the sharing of what you may have in common. This practice would make for a better start, to engage with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person.
- Without imposing, ask about their interests (try not to be too direct).
- It is important to respect their rights to privacy, confidentiality, and their unwillingness to share their interests, in the early days of placement.
- Like all children and young people coming into care, give them time to adjust and build their trust in you. Remember that too much distance though, may bring on feelings of isolation from their families and significant others. Remember that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people often come from big extended families.
- Keep in mind that like all children and young people, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people share similar interests, such as sports, different recreational activities, movies, video games, stories and country.
- You will need to consider that for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child coming into care, that they may not have had the same opportunities to be exposed to or have access to the same activities as other children and young people.

Ensuring children and young people have a voice

- Be culturally sensitive to an Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander's child or young persons needs. Your language, dress and gender "may be" some of the contributing factors, as to why one may not feel comfortable in speaking with you. If in doubt, check this out with another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who is connected to supporting the placement.
- Kinship roles for an Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander's child or young person will differ from other children or young people. This might mean that they see their rights are different, as at times they have had to sometimes take on the role of an adult, for example, a young Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman might have had to care for their younger siblings from the age of six and take on all of the responsibilities that of a mother, this practice might be a normal part of tradition for that particular family. Respect their rights to share their experiences, as that may be part of their kinship role.
- Like all children and young people it is important to speak with an Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander's child or young person without bias or prejudice.
- Ensure that you treat children and young people with understanding and respect.
- Ensure children and young people in care know, that if they are unhappy, confused or feeling that their cultural needs are not being met, that they can speak to a number of people who may be able to help them.
- Identify with them, people who they trust and can speak to. Write their names and numbers down and ensure that it is kept in a place where they have access to it.
- You can provide them with numbers that they can phone to voice their concerns and ask for assistance, such as:
 - Office of the Public Guardian 1800 661 533(freecall)
 - Ombudsman Office 07 3229 5116 OR 1800 068 908 (freecall outside of Brisbane)
 - Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal 1300 753 228

Encouraging a child's sense of safety and identity

- Encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to have contact with their family and community.
- Encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to attend significant events, such as:
 - Traditional ceremonies, significant birthdays, traditional dancing ceremonies, funerals, feasting, NAIDOC activities, women's ceremonies, men's ceremonies, visual and performing arts ceremonies, indigenous sporting carnivals. Most of these places will provide an opportunity, for children and young people to reconnect with other people from their cultural backgrounds. If you need to find out what's happening in your local area you can speak with an Indigenous officer from the Department, who is appointed to support the placement or a person from your nearest recognised agency.
- Engage with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders elders group, which the child or young person belongs to or identifies with. An elder will sometimes offer assistance and advice about the child or young persons origins and share stories of significance which will assist them in maintaining their cultural identity.
- With permission and support from the child or young person's parents, you can take them to the State Library of Queensland to do their own research into their family history. This has to be done with sensitivity and respect for the child and their family. The State Library is located on Level 3 State Library of Queensland, corner of Peel and Stanley Streets, South Bank, Brisbane or telephone (07) 3840 7911.
- Identifying - An Aboriginal person is someone who is of Aboriginal descent and who identifies as an Aboriginal and is accepted as such by the Aboriginal community in which he or she identifies with. A Torres Strait Islander person is someone who is of Torres Strait Islander descent and who identifies as a Torres Strait Islander and is accepted by the community in which he or she identifies with.
- Use websites available including – Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) at <http://www.qatsicpp.com.au/> or Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) <http://www.snaicc.asn.au/>

These definitions allow for self-identification and allows for parents or guardians to provide identification of children. At the earliest stage of contact with a client, the Department must establish whether a child is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Consultation may be required with family members and the child if of an appropriate age and ability. Liaison with the Recognised Entity or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community representatives or organisations may be necessary to ensure proper cultural identity is established.

Accepting a placement - what do you need to consider?

Obtain information on the child or young person to ensure that you can meet their needs, without causing undue problems for your own family. Obtain this from the worker over the phone or in person, eg behavioural risk factors, ongoing appointments. You can also use the Checklist for Accepting a placement provided during the training.

- Is the placement intended to be emergency/short term/long term?
- What order is the child on?
- Is this the child's first experience of being cared for away from home?
- What is the goal for this child or young person?
- How will you interact with the child or young person's family?
- Seek advice from the worker and your support person who knows your family and situation, to enable you to make an informed decision.
- Discuss with your partner and family first before making a decision. Consider the needs of your own family including physical and emotional space, safety factors.
- Consider the decision carefully as placement breakdown can increase feelings of rejection for children and young people.
- If you agree to the placement but are worried about your capacity to meet some of the child's needs, request a placement meeting immediately to formalise supports that you will need from the department.

Prepare your family carefully for the placement

- 1) Provide key information eg how long it is likely to be for, what the goal is for the placement.
- 2) Talk through how the placement will affect your family eg house rules, disclosures by the child or young person, why the foster child or young person may be treated differently, acknowledgment of possible difficulties.
- 3) Discuss confidentiality issues – what to tell school friends, relatives.
- 4) Who else in the family can be involved eg grandparents.
- 5) What might be the impact on your family's wider social network?

Accepting a placement – questions to ask

To help a foster carer to decide whether or not to take a placement being offered, the foster carer may ask the following questions:

General issues

- sex and age of the child/children
- proposed length of placement
- reason for placement
- has the child/young person been placed in care previously
- if the child/young person is coming to this placement from another carer, is it possible to speak with the carer
- what order is the child on
- religion/culture of child or young person

Family Contact

- how frequent
- with whom
- where are visits to be held
- who transports the child to and from visits
- are visits supervised, if so, by whom
- has a Risk Assessment been completed

Medical Needs

- is the child on any medication
- are there any medical diagnosis
- are there any medical appointments – when and where
- are there any dental appointment – when and where
- do you have the child's Medicare number
- does the child have a current health care card
- any special dietary requirements
- does the child have a regular doctor
- are Mum and/or Dad intravenous drug users

Behavioural Issues

- are there any behavioural issues that I need to know about ie: problem sexual behaviours
- how are these managed
- is there any known history of sexual abuse
- any history of incidents of violence to self or to others including adults
- is there a history of any previous allegations made by the child/young person towards carers

Education

- does the child attend day care, preschool, school or other institution

- where and what level and how often
- how will the child get there
- if there are costs involved who will pay these
- does the child/young person need to attend their current school
- is there an Education Support Plan developed

Cultural Support Plan

- is there a current Cultural Support Plan
- what actions are there in the Cultural Support Plan that I need to action

Baby/Toddler

- does the baby/toddler use a dummy
- does the baby/toddler have a special toy/teddy for comfort
- is the baby/toddler in day or night nappies
- what brand of formula does the baby/toddler have
- is the baby on solid food/what types
- any special dietary requirements eg: lactose intolerant

Things you can do to welcome children and young people

- Tell the child or young person who you are and what they can call you.
- In consultation with the worker, clearly outline what is happening and what is likely to happen in the future.
- Tell the child or young person what arrangements have been made to maintain contact with their family – when and how this will happen.
- Make the child or young person feel less of a stranger by telling them about the house, family members, pets, routines.
- Be aware of first impressions – the child or young person may be feeling vulnerable – or may be hostile if they have had bad experiences before. Your behaviour and attitude – the way you say things and your manner is important. Be warm and welcoming.

Building trust with children and young people

The way you listen and encourage children and young people to talk to you about themselves is a powerful method for establishing trust. The way you ask questions can play an important part in trying to learn more about someone.

- Closed questions – Do you like going to visit your grandma?
- Open questions – How do you feel about going to visit your grandma?
- Leading questions – It's nice when you go to visit your grandma isn't it?

Open questions will generally allow someone to speak more freely.

Respecting the child or young person's right to privacy

Children have a right to privacy that is recognised in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Charter of rights for a child in care*.

The right to privacy includes physical privacy, communications privacy and information privacy.

Some of the ways of showing respect for a child's privacy include:

- Respect a child's personal belongings and personal space.
- Respect a child's right to privacy in their relationships and communications with others (such as their family and friends), in an age appropriate way.
- Don't pressure the child or young person for information.
- Maintain the confidentiality of the child's information.

However, it is important that the child or young person knows that some things cannot be kept secret (e.g. disclosures of harm) and the reason for this is that so appropriate help can be provided.

The importance of confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important way of respecting information privacy as well as building trust – the child or young person needs to feel that their information and the things they tell you are valued pieces of information, and will not be shared unnecessarily.

It is also a legal obligation under the *Child Protection Act 1999*. A breach of your confidentiality obligations is an offence and may be punishable by a fine or imprisonment. Therefore it is important to always be aware of your confidentiality obligations, particularly in social situations and when using social media such as Facebook, MySpace and forums.

When disclosing information to others, consider whether it is necessary to do so for purposes related to the child's protection or wellbeing or to perform your functions as a carer. If in doubt, ask your child safety officer or foster and kinship care service.

In addition, you must **not** publish information or photographs, **without** the written approval of the department that could identify a child as:

- a child who is or has been the subject of an investigation under the Act
- a child in the chief executive's custody or guardianship
- a child for whom an order is in force, or
- a child in Queensland who has been harmed, allegedly harmed or is allegedly at risk of harm caused by a parent, step-parent or another family member.

The definition of 'publishing' includes posting on any form of social media such as Facebook and Instagram as well as traditional publishing, such as newspaper, radio or television.

Your confidentiality obligations continue even after a child has left your care – regardless of how much time has passed since the child has lived with you.

Confidentially obligations may also apply to people to whom you disclose information about a child in care, even if they are not aware of those obligations.

Discuss confidentiality with a child safety officer or your foster and kinship care service before you consider posting any information or photographs of your family and the child in care on social media sites.

What I can say or do

- Tell a neighbour that sometimes Johnny needs assistance with his homework.
- Ask a friend for help with getting an appointment with a specialist for Amy.
- Tell family at a BBQ that sometimes Brodie gets angry and aggressive, and they might need to respond to his behaviour in a particular way.

What I can NOT say or do

- Tell a neighbour that sometimes Johnny needs assistance with his homework because he is intellectually impaired as a result of his mother's alcoholism.
- Ask a friend for help with getting an appointment with a specialist for Amy because she has psychological issues after being sexually abused by her stepdad.
- Tell family at a BBQ that sometimes Brodie gets angry and aggressive because he finds contact with his biological parents upsetting. **However**, it might be important to share this information with his teacher, so they can understand and help him to deal with those issues.

Remember; always disclose the least amount of information as is necessary.

Preparing your family

It is important to prepare your own children for dealing with questions about a child in your care. You should cover the following points with your own child:

- Explain to your child that the child in care has the right to privacy and that information about them must not be shared with friends or any other people because this would make the child feel unhappy and betrayed.

- Share general information about why children and young people come into care in a respectful and age appropriate level.
- Tell your own child that children and young people in care may have had difficult or hurtful experiences that may cause them to behave in unfamiliar ways.
- Tell your own child that it is important for them to let you know if a child in your care says something to them that is confusing or upsetting, even if they are asked to keep it a secret.

If you have any doubts about what you can or cannot share please **contact your child safety officer or foster and kinship care service** for advice

You can help children and young people feel respected and understood by:

- Listening carefully – sitting at their level, nodding, and waiting for more information.
- Letting them talk about their concerns in their own way – not interrupting or putting words in their mouth.
- Acknowledge feelings – eg “I can see why you are upset about that, but have you thought about - - -”.
- Giving plenty of opportunity to ask questions.
- Explaining what you can realistically do.
- Being honest and not making promises unless you can keep them.
- Not dismissing their worries or putting them down.

Promoting a positive sense of self and identity in a child or young person

Communication skills used to establish a relationship remain important in developing ongoing relationships with children and young people, their families and other people who are important to them. There is a need to continue to build and maintain trust and understanding, and demonstrate respect for children and their families.

In order to develop a positive sense of self it is important not to develop inappropriate dependencies – it is about helping children and young people grow and move towards independence, not to lean on you as the one who knows best.

Helping a child or young person work out what they need themselves, and assisting them find resources to do this, will encourage a sense of achievement and develop skills that are useful in other situations.

Helping to promote self esteem

Children and young people in care may have experienced disruptions to important relationships and may experience feelings of rejection and guilt. Self esteem is likely to be low.

Consider ways to assist children and young people develop positive self esteem by:

- Establishing a trusting relationship by being honest, consistent and reliable.

- Showing that you accept them as people- even if you do not accept all of their behaviour.
- Letting them know that you respect their individuality – that they are unique.
- Giving regular praise and concentrate on positive things about them.
- Listening and giving regular time and attention.
- Building on their own strengths and interests – extra-curricular activities that will build self image.
- Helping them increase their skills in solving personal problems, and praise them each time you see them resolve something.

Foster carers as part of a team

It is important that out-of-home care is seen as part of a holistic response that meets the protective needs of children or young people. As foster carers, you can contribute to that response by creating an environment where children and young people feel valued and respected and where their views are actively sought. You can also demonstrate respect for families and wherever possible involve them in care arrangements. This will assist in maintaining continuity of relationships for children and young people. You can expect to be included in planning discussions and for your views to be treated with respect.

It is important that you are aware of the need to seek supports for yourself as this work can be difficult. Foster carers should be comfortable in advocating to have those needs met. Support in this process can be found with your worker in the first instance, foster carer representative, FAST representative or Queensland Foster and Kinship Care.

Role of the recognised entity

- Any decisions about an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person must only be made after consultation with the Recognised Entity.
- This includes the decisions about departmental response to alleged concerns and the ongoing decisions about caring for the child or young person.
- The Recognised Entity will often assist with finding an appropriate placement for the child and provide support to that placement.
- In some cases, where the Recognised Entity is a licensed care service, they may recruit, train, assess, and support potential foster and kinship carers.
- Their role is to ensure the standard of care provided to children and young people meets legislative requirements, including the Statement of Standards.

Role of the Licensed Care Service

- The role of licensed care services is to recruit, train, assess and support foster and kinship carers. Some of these roles are shared with departmental staff.
- Some carers are supported by the department while some are supported by licensed care services.

- Licensed care services ensure that the standard of care provided to children and young people meets legislated requirements including the Statement of Standards.
- The role of the support worker is to assist you to provide quality care to a child or young person in accordance with training you have received, and to identify your training and support needs and assist in meeting those needs.
- The support worker will attend any placement meetings with you, and assist in the process of negotiating a placement.