

Child Safety POLICY

Title: Foster care matching: a partnership approach

Policy No: 639-1

Policy Statement:

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Child Safety) is committed to ensuring that children in care, who are unable to live with their own parents, families or communities, are provided with the best opportunities to experience safety, belonging and wellbeing while they are in care.

When it is not possible to place a child with kin, and a family-based care option outside of the child's family and community is the most suitable care arrangement for an individual child, then effective matching of a child with a foster carer who can meet their needs is critical to achieving positive outcomes for the child.

Child Safety and foster and kinship care services (care services) share responsibilities for different parts of the matching process, and must work in partnership to identify the most suitable care arrangement for a child. This requires sharing their respective knowledge, experience and skills, and working together to identify supports in order to effect the best care arrangement for the child.

This process requires having quality information about the child's assessed needs as well as the skills and capabilities of potential foster carers. Where it is identified that there may be particular needs presented by the match between the child's needs and the foster carer's capacity and capability, then the early identification and provision of targeted supports, services and strategies will be put in place to improve the quality of care and reduce the risk of disruption and other negative consequences for the child.

Principles:

- High quality care arrangements provide safety, stability, security and supports to enable a child in care to develop secure attachments, belonging, wellbeing and identity.
- Care arrangement decisions, particularly those relating to an Aboriginal child or Torres Strait Islander child will ensure they remain connected to their family, community, and culture. Connections to country will also be a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Care arrangement decisions recognise the importance of sibling relationships through either keeping them together, where this is possible, or preserving sibling connections where they are separated.
- In the process of matching a child with a foster carer, the child's safety, belonging, wellbeing and best interests are paramount and the focus is on the carer's circumstances, capacity and capability to meet the child's needs.

- The child will be involved in decisions about where and with whom they live, having due regard to their age, capacity to understand and any trauma they have experienced; and their views must be taken into account.
- The foster carer's level of commitment, experience, skills and knowledge are valued, and it is recognised that with adequate supports, most carers are capable of developing their skills and capability.
- The provision of quality information about the child's needs and the prospective foster carer's skills and capabilities is the foundation for good decision making.
- Foster carers are provided with written information about the child so that their decision to proceed with the care arrangement is a well-informed one.
- Foster carers are supported by care services and Child Safety to care for the child in accordance with the standards of care.
- Providing timely and targeted support to children and foster carers can reduce the risk of disruption to the child's care arrangement and improve the continuity of care arrangements for the child.
- Decisions made under the *Child Protection Act 1999* in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families promote their safe care and connection with family, community and culture.

Objectives:

Care arrangement matching in the context of foster care is defined as the process of identifying a potential carer family whose motivation, characteristics, skills and experience will, as far as possible, meet the assessed needs of a child or sibling group. This process takes into account the assessment information specific to the child, primarily known to Child Safety, as well as carer assessment information primarily known to the foster and kinship care service.

Matching is viewed as a process and not a single event, which is best achieved by the key parties working together to find the best outcome for the child, throughout the different phases:

- working collaboratively with the child and family to make decisions about where and with whom the child will live
- gathering information and making the referral
- assessing foster carer options
- planning supports for the care arrangement
- deciding where and with whom the child will live.

The policy aims to ensure that each child to be placed with a foster carer is matched with an appropriate carer family capable of meeting the needs of that individual child. As it is not always possible to secure a perfect match between a child's needs and the skills, qualities and characteristics of available carers, the supporting procedures and guidelines:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the key parties and
- provide for a shared framework for assessing the match of a child to a proposed foster carer.

When the match between child and carer results in a need for additional supports, services or strategies to best equip the carer to respond to the child's needs, then both Child Safety and the care service are required to work together to identify and plan how the child's needs will be addressed in the care arrangement and facilitate access to relevant supports.

Scope:

This policy relates to all children in care, through a care agreement, assessment order or child protection order granting custody or guardianship to the Chief Executive, and who are subject of a referral requesting a care arrangement with a foster carer. This includes a referral for a primary care arrangement or an ongoing respite arrangement with the same foster carer.

The policy does not apply to:

- other types of care arrangements, such as kinship care, residential care, semi-independent living or safe houses
- a child subject to a child protection order granting custody to a member of a child's family
- a child subject to a child protection order granting guardianship to a person other than the Chief Executive, unless referred to a care service for ongoing respite care with the same carer.

Where care arrangements are being sought after-hours or in emergency situations, it may not be possible to engage in a thorough matching process prior to placing the child. Where the care arrangement is to continue for more than three business days, the identification of needed supports can be incorporated into the first placement agreement, developed as soon as possible.

Care services refer to all foster and kinship care services funded by Child Safety, including those in receipt of additional funding to provide intensive foster and kinship care programs, high-plus supports, and flexible support funding.

Roles and Responsibilities:

The key parties involved in the matching process include:

- The Child Safety Service Centres (CSSC), where the Child Safety Officer (CSO) has case planning and case management responsibilities for the child in care. In addition, the CSSC Senior Team Leader and Manager are delegated under the *Child Protection Act 1999* for deciding where a child in care will live.
- The Placement Services Units (PSU) which are specialist work units based in each Child Safety district. They build effective relationships with the care services operating in their district and provide the conduit for referrals between the CSSCs and care services throughout the care arrangement matching process.
- Care services (specifically foster and kinship care services) which provide the management and monitoring of quality care arrangements with foster carers through recruiting, training, assessing and supporting a pool of carers to meet the diverse needs of children in care within a specified district or region. One of their key roles is to provide comprehensive support to assist carers to implement and achieve the agreed goal and outcomes of the child's case plan.

Foster carers who are volunteers who provide quality care in a family setting, to meet the needs of the child placed in their care by Child Safety. Carers are volunteers and can decline care arrangements they consider inappropriate for their family and circumstances

Phase one: gathering assessment information and making the referral

Child Safety staff have a number of responsibilities in this phase due to their assessment and case management knowledge of the child and the child's parents and family, together with their regular direct contact with the child, parents and family members. For the CSO, the responsibilities include:

- documenting assessment information about the child's care needs, as gathered from a range of sources including the child, family members, former carers or care services, and other professionals and services who are, or have been involved with the child, as well as Child Safety records
- identifying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's language or Island group
- consulting with the PSU to determine the appropriate level of the child's support needs, and the most suitable type of foster care
- talking with the child about the proposed care arrangement, so that they know what is happening and why; and valuing their views about the proposed care arrangement, in accordance with their ability to understand, their level of maturity and trauma history
- arranging an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander entity for the child, in consultation and with the agreement of the child and family, to help facilitate their participation in a decision about where or with whom a child will live
- seeking the parents' view about the most suitable type of care arrangement for their child
- completing the referral documentation for the PSU.

During this phase the PSU is responsible for:

- maintaining a process for the efficient receipt of referrals from CSSCs
- consulting and working with the CSSC to refine the referral information, as required
- maintaining a process for the management of referrals to and responses from care services.

Phase two: assessing carer capabilities and capacities and categorising the level of match

Care services staff have extensive knowledge about their respective foster carers' skills and capabilities. This information is drawn from the formal carer assessments undertaken at regular intervals, as well as throughout their regular support contacts with them. Care services are also responsible for the provision of ongoing training to their carers, designed to build their skills and capabilities. In this phase, care services are responsible for:

- maintaining a recording system that enables the identification of the characteristics, experience, skills, abilities and challenges of their foster carers, to enable effective matching when children are referred for placement
- canvassing all available care arrangements
- seeking additional information from the carer's support worker, and in intensive foster care programs, the support worker for any child currently in carers care
- providing the proposed foster carers with documentation outlining the child's characteristics, needs and challenges to inform a discussion about the child potentially being placed with them.

Phase three: planning supports for the proposed care arrangement

This phase requires both Child Safety and care services to work collaboratively so that the referred child can be cared for by the most suitable foster carer best equipped to meet their individual needs by:

- using the care arrangement matching factors, identifying gaps between the child's needs and the foster carers capabilities, skills and knowledge
- giving particular consideration to the child's needs in areas such as health, education

and family contact and connections

- for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, giving particular consideration to how the child's relationships with parents, siblings and other people of significance to the child under Aboriginal tradition or Island custom will be optimised
- considering how the child's needs can be met by the proposed foster carer
- facilitating discussions with the proposed foster carers about their capacity and capabilities to meet the child's needs and the immediate additional supports they may require
- determining how to best equip the carers to respond to the particular needs presented by the proposed match, initially from within current resourcing of the care service and Child Safety
- gaining approval from the person with the delegated authority, if extra-ordinary supports are required
- documenting the agreed supports and the roles and responsibilities of identified care services and Child Safety staff.

During this phase the PSU is responsible for:

- contacting the CSSC with case management responsibility for other children already living with the proposed foster carer, to determine the impact of the proposed care arrangement on the foster carer's continued ability to meet the needs of the existing child
- seeking permission from the CSSC Manager responsible for the carer, if they live in a geographical area covered by another CSSC.

Phase four: deciding where and with whom the child will live

The CSSC Senior Team Leader and Manager have the legislative authority under the *Child Protection Act 1999* to make the decision about where and with whom a child, who is in the custody or guardianship of the Child Executive, will live. In addition, the CSSC is responsible for:

- arranging an independent Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child to help facilitate the child's and family's participation in decisions about where or with whom the child will live
- assessing the provision of placement information to parents
- contacting the proposed foster carers for their views about level and nature of placement information to be provided to the child's parents
- informing the parents and the child of the decision about the placement information provided to the parents
- approving the care arrangement.

Authority:

Child Protection Act 1999

Child Protection Regulation 2011

Delegations:

Refer to the instruments of delegation for decisions made under the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

Records File No.: 12/108/126592-P130
Date of approval: 30 July 2018
Date of operation: 30 July 2018
Date to be reviewed: 30 July 2021 (minor update 18 October 2018)

Office: Operational Support, Child and Family Operations
Help Contact: Operational Support

Links:

Related Policies

Decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (641)

Participation by children and young people in decision-making (369)

Placement of children as part of an integrated child protection response (578)

Carer participation (460)

Case planning (263)

Information exchange and service delivery co-ordination (403)

Carer learning and support (457)

Related procedures

Child Safety Practice Manual

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