

Manual for **kinship carers** 





# Manual for **kinship carers**

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Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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# Foreword by the Minister for Families and Children



As a kinship carer, you play a crucial role in supporting the development and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people living in out-of-home care. Kinship care is the preferred placement option for these children and young people, because it minimises disruption to a child or young person's life, gives them strong and resilient relationships, and ensures that they can maintain their connection to family networks.

Kinship care has the highest proportion of children and young people living in out-of-home care placements. Often, children and young people who enter a kinship care arrangement have experienced considerable upheaval or adversity before they come to be cared for by you, their family member, friend or community member.

I have often said that kinship carers have my greatest admiration for the devotion to the children in their care, often in traumatic circumstances The Victorian Government understands the challenges that many kinship carers face when taking on the important role of providing a secure and stable home for a child or young person, and creating committed relationships. For this to happen, kinship carers need to be equipped with the right training and support to help children and young people overcome the traumas associated with abuse and neglect, and to strengthen their connections to family, culture and identity.

That is why the Victorian Government has invested in the development of a manual for kinship carers, which is designed to be a valuable information tool to assist you in your role. It will help you to navigate through the child protection system, and provide you with information about child protection processes, financial and other support available to you and the children and young people in your care, and important resources.

The manual was developed in consultation with Kinship Carers Victoria, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Government staff, kinship care service providers and kinship carers.

This manual is just one of the ways we are improving access to support services and information that will be useful to you. The Carer KaFE: Kinship and Foster Care Education was launched in April 2017 and will improve and expand carer knowledge by providing access to face-to-face training, online learning, accredited training opportunities and conference attendance sponsorship. In 2016, we also announced further flexible funding for kinship carers to access support for extraordinary expenses such as medical related expenses, transport and child care. The government is also providing better support to kinship carers by boosting the capacity of the peak state body, Kinship Carers Victoria.

I am committed to ensuring that children across Victoria grow up safe and healthy, and achieve the best possible outcomes. To this end, the Victorian Government's Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children is strengthening services that support children, young people and families. The Roadmap is a once in a generation reform that will reorient the child protection and family services sector from a crisis response to early intervention and prevention. This is also an important step in the Government's commitment to implementing all 227 recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. These are not quick or easy processes, but we are committed to taking action because we know how working together can make a difference.

In Victoria, Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in the child protection and out-of-home care system. The Victorian Government is strengthening Aboriginal self-determination by transitioning

the care of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection or out-ofhome care system to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care is a new program that enables the Secretary of the department to authorise an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified functions and powers in relation to a protection order for an Aboriginal child. Giving Aboriginal communities greater responsibility over the safety and protection of vulnerable children is an important step towards improving the wellbeing and cultural connection of Aboriginal children who are involved with child protection.

We understand that being a kinship carer requires an enormous commitment, both physically and emotionally. By providing a loving and caring home, you play a crucial role in building positive opportunities and connections to the children and young people in your care. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to every kinship carer in Victoria for your commitment, compassion and hard work in caring for some of the state's most vulnerable children and young people.

I hope this manual provides you with the support and information you need to carry out your vital role.

Jenny Mikakos MP
Minister for Families and Children

# Foreword by Kinship Carers Victoria

Kinship care is provided by a family member, close friend or other significant person in a child or young person's life, when they cannot live with their natural parents. It is the fastest growing form of care for these children and young people. In Victoria, over 60 per cent of children and young people in out-of-home care are placed with a kinship carer.

Kinship Carers Victoria believes that kinship care is the most effective form of out-of-home care, and offers children and young people the best outcomes. It ensures that they stay with people who are familiar to them, reducing the level of trauma they experience. Importantly, it provides great opportunity for ongoing family connections to be maintained.

'Family looking after family' is not a new concept. This worldwide growth in kinship care has crept up on governments and the wider community, resulting in a vacuum of policy and best practice to support it. However, in Victoria, government and community sectors have been working together for some time to fill the vacuum.

### For example:

- The Victorian Government introduced a mainstream kinship care support program in 2010 and an Aboriginal kinship care support program in 2011. These programs provide local support groups, as well as individual case management to carers.
- In 2011, the Victorian Government funded Kinship Carers Victoria, the peak body for kinship carers in Victoria, which provides a collective voice for kinship carers by way of targeted lobbying to achieve systematic change, and raise awareness and recognition of kinship care.
- In 2012, the Victorian Government funded the production of a handbook for kinship carers.
- In 2012 and again in 2017, Victorian kinship carers will have access to carer information and support sessions delivered at a local level.

The production of this manual is a further attempt to ensure that kinship carers are well informed about their rights and responsibilities. It offers detailed and accurate information that all carers need to know. The information will empower and enable them to better fulfil their role.

I recommend the manual to every kinship carer and feel confident that, although written primarily for statutory carers who are the primary and legislated responsibility of government, all carers will benefit from its use.

Finally, I thank the kinship carers of Victoria for their contribution to the wellbeing of their families and the community at large. By raising some of Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people, they are making a significant contribution to the wellbeing of Victoria as a whole.

Anne L McLeish OAM
Director, Kinship Carers Victoria



# 1. About this manual

# 1. About this manual

The Victorian Government acknowledges the Koorie community's Traditional Custodians, their lands and waters. We are committed to Aboriginal self-determination through a whole-of-government, coordinated and focused approach for Aboriginal affairs in Victoria.

This manual has been developed to support you in your important role as a kinship carer. It clarifies your role, and the roles of others involved in the care of children and young people, who are subject to child protection intervention in Victoria. Privately arranged or informal kinship carers who are caring for children and young people not involved with child protection may also find information in this manual useful.

It answers common questions and explains:

- what to expect as a kinship carer
- the out-of-home care system
- the services available to you and the child or young person in your care
- ways in which you can be an effective advocate for a child or young person.

The manual describes a sometimes complex system and aims to help you understand some of the behaviours and emotions you may see in the children and young people you care for, providing tools to help you support them.

This manual includes the changes to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act), which came into effect on 1 March 2016. At the time of publication, this information is consistent with the Victorian Child Protection Manual

If you want more information about a specific topic in this manual, each chapter includes a *Useful resources* section. There are a number of information sheets on relevant topics included at the back of the manual, as well as a glossary and list of acronyms to explain terminology used throughout the manual.

The manual contains regular references to the needs of Aboriginal children and young people and organisations. It should be noted that in this manual, the term Aboriginal relates to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people and organisations, unless stated otherwise. Indigenous is retained when it is part of a title, report, program or quotation.

Aboriginal children and young people make up approximately 20 per cent of all children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system. This results from the impact of past government policies including the Stolen Generations, which led to many Aboriginal children and young people becoming disconnected from their families, communities and culture.

The Victorian Government is investing in new initiatives to assist Aboriginal children and families involved with child protection.

The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) is working to maximise the involvement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). This manual refers to Section 18 of the Act, which allows the Secretary to authorise the Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified powers and functions in relation to a protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person.

Under a new program called Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care, once a protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person has been made by the Children's Court, an approved Aboriginal agency may be authorised to take on responsibility for the child's case management and case plan, instead of child protection.

Transitioning Aboriginal Children to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is a project dedicated to coordinating the gradual transition of the care and case management of Aboriginal children and young people from government and non-Aboriginal organisations to ACCOs. It is expected that over time, all home-based carers of Aboriginal children and young people with be supported and supervised by an ACCO. Existing carers who care for an Aboriginal child or young person will be encouraged and supported to transfer to a registered ACCO.

We would like to thank the many contributors to this manual, including Kinship Carers Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, OzChild, Department of Education and Training staff, Department of Health and Human Services staff, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

This manual cannot address every issue that may arise during your time as a kinship carer. Some issues need individual responses and you should discuss these with child protection or your agency (if involved).

Kinship Carers Victoria is available for you to contact by calling (03) 9372 2422 for additional support.

# 2. Rights and responsibilities

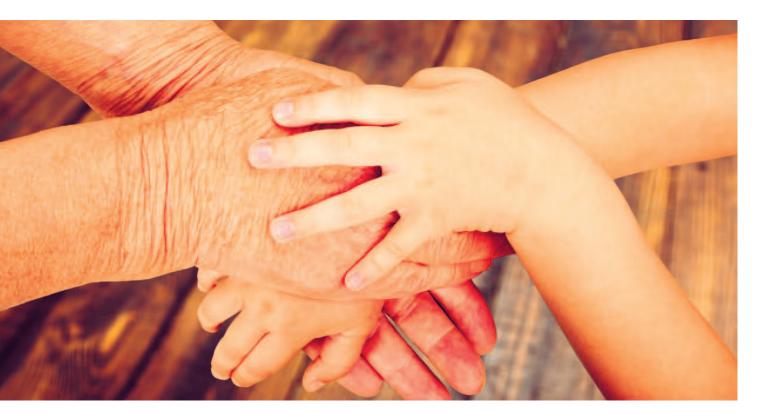
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# 2. Rights and responsibilities

## Charter for children in out-of-home care

The Charter for children in out-of-home care has been prepared specifically for children and young people who cannot live with their parents and are in out-of-home care. It lists what they should expect from all those people who look after them and work with them while they are in care.

This charter also provides a guide for workers and carers about the sorts of things they need to make sure happen for children and young people in their care.



### A child and young person's rights

As a child or young person in care, I need:

- to be safe and feel safe
- to stay healthy and well, and go to a doctor, dentist or other professional for help when I need to
- to be allowed to be a child and be treated with respect
- if I am an Aboriginal child, to feel proud and strong in my own culture
- to have a say and be heard
- to be provided with information
- to tell someone if I am unhappy
- to know information about me will only be shared in order to help people look after me
- to have a worker who is there for me

- to keep in contact with my family, friends and people and places that matter to me
- careful thought being given to where
   I will live, so I will have a home that feels
   like a home
- to have fun and do activities that I enjoy
- to be able to take part in family traditions, and be able to learn about and be involved with cultural and religious groups that are important to me
- to be provided with the best possible education and training
- to be able to develop life skills and grow up to become the best person I can
- help in preparing myself to leave care and support after I leave care.

There is a range of resources designed to help children and young people understand their rights in care, to assist staff to engage with them about their rights, and to help agencies embed this charter into their policies and procedures. See the **Charter for children in out-of-home** care resources section on the department's website for further information at <a href="http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care">http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care</a>.

# **Carers Recognition Act 2012**

Victoria has legislation that recognises, promotes and values the role of carers. The *Carers Recognition Act 2012* formally acknowledges the important contribution that people in care relationships make to our community, and the unique knowledge that carers hold about the child or young person in their care.

# The Victorian charter supporting people in care relationships

The Carers Recognition Act 2012 is supported by The Victorian charter supporting people in care relationships and includes situations where someone is being cared for under the Act in a kinship, foster or permanent care arrangement.

As a carer, you should:

- be respected and recognised:
  - as an individual with your own needs
  - as a carer
  - as someone with special knowledge of the person in your care
- be supported as an individual and as a carer, including during changes to the care relationship

- be recognised for your efforts and dedication as a carer, and for the social and economic contribution to the community arising from your role as a carer
- have your views and cultural identity taken into account, together with the views, cultural identity, needs and best interests of the child or young person for whom you care, in matters relating to the care relationship. This includes when decisions are made that impact on you and the care relationship.
- have your social wellbeing and health recognised in matters relating to the care relationship
- have considered in decision making the effect of being a carer on your participation in employment and education.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Carers Recognition Act 2012 <a href="https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/carers-recognition-act-2012/">https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/carers-recognition-act-2012/>
- ► Charter for children in out-of-home care <a href="http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care">http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care</a>
- ▶ Victorian charter supporting people in care relationships <a href="https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/web-assets/victorian-government/charter-supporting-care-ralationships/">https://www.carersvictoria.org.au/web-assets/victorian-government/charter-supporting-care-ralationships/</a>



# 3. Kinship care

# 3. Kinship care

If the Victorian child protection service requires an out-of-home care placement for a child or young person in need of protection, this will include placement with:

- an approved kinship carer
- an accredited foster carer through a community service organisation, or
- a residential care provider.

When a child or young person needs an out-of-home care placement, it is a legislative requirement that kinship care be explored before other placement options are pursued. As a kinship carer, you provide the child or young person in your care with a connection and shared family history, culture and identity. This will usually provide a less traumatic experience of child protection intervention for them and their family.

Kinship and foster care are often referred to as home-based care because they occur in a home setting.

Kinship care is the care provided by relatives or a member of a child or young person's social network, when they cannot live with their parents due to safety and protective concerns.

Aboriginal kinship care is care provided by relatives or friends of an Aboriginal child or young person who cannot live with their

parents, where Aboriginal family, community and Aboriginal culture are valued as central to the child or young person's safety, stability and development.

Kinship placements occur as a result of child protection intervention, either voluntarily or under a Children's Court order, and are supported and supervised by child protection or a community service organisation (agency).

# Privately arranged or informal kinship care

Privately arranged or informal kinship care are terms that may be used to describe arrangements where children and young people are cared for by relatives without any child protection intervention.

While this manual is aimed at kinship carers who care for children and young people subject to child protection intervention, privately arranged or informal kinship carers may also find information in this manual useful.

### Safety screening

Before placing a child with a kinship carer, child protection completes a preliminary assessment and mandatory safety screening. This includes:

- a national police history check for every member of the household over 18 years
- an assessment of the previous history of the potential carer(s) through a review of the department's Client Relationship Information System
- an assessment of the primary carer's likelihood to pass a Working with Children Check (WWCC).

#### Police checks

To be approved as a kinship carer, child protection will conduct a national police check on you and anyone else over the age of 18 who usually lives in the house. Information from the police check is only shown to those who are deciding if you can be approved as a kinship carer.

You may still be approved as a kinship carer if you have a criminal record, but this will depend on the individual circumstances.

When child protection is considering whether a criminal record affects the suitability of the kinship carer, they will take into consideration:

- what the crime was
- why you, or any other adult in the home, committed the crime
- how long it has been since the crime was committed
- if this could put a child or young person at risk.

### **Working with Children Checks**

Kinship care is considered to be 'child-related work' under the *Working with Children Act 2005* and all primary kinship carers, approved by the

Victorian child protection program, must hold a WWCC. This includes current, new and respite kinship carers.

The WWCC is an ongoing screening process that provides greater protection for children and young people in kinship care by monitoring a person's suitability to work with or care for them. It screens a person's criminal record to ensure those charged with, or convicted of, certain serious crimes, are unable to work with children or young people. It is renewed every five years.

Only primary kinship carers need to apply for a WWCC. In your household, where there may be one or more people who have been approved as a child or young person's carer, all are required to hold a WWCC.

You are required by law to apply for a WWCC. You should apply for one within 21 days from the date the child or young person is placed in your care or, if you already hold a WWCC card, you need to update your details to include your status as a kinship carer within 21 days from the date the child or young person is placed in your care.

If you do not apply for, or update, a WWCC, you will be in breach of the law and the child or young person cannot remain in your care. There is no cost for a kinship carer to apply for a WWCC in Victoria. You can apply online via the **WWCC** website at <a href="https://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/">www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/</a> and click on the 'Apply for Check' button.

In the Organisational field, it is essential that you use the full Department of Health and Human Services address and phone number:

Department of Health and Human Services

PCB- Safety Screening – Kinship Carer GPO Box 4057 Melbourne 3000

Phone: 03 9096 5715

It is also important that you select '80 – Kinship carer – caring for a child placed by Child Protection under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*' in the dropdown box in the Occupation field.

You must select 'Volunteer' for occupation type.

For more information, contact the Working with Children Check Unit customer support line on 1300 652 879, email <workingwithchildren@justice.vic.gov.au> or visit <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/>.

For any questions about this process, you can contact the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Criminal record factsheets on the Woor-Dungin website <a href="http://www.woor-dungin.com.au/criminal-record-fact-sheets/">http://www.woor-dungin.com.au/criminal-record-fact-sheets/</a>
- ▶ Working with children checks <a href="http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/">http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ **Kinship care assessment** in the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/kinship-placement/kinship-care-assessment">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/kinship-placement/kinship-care-assessment</a>



# 4. Your role and responsibilities

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# 4. Your role and responsibilities

# A nurturing home

Your role as a kinship carer is to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children or young people in your care. The environment you provide must also ensure cultural safety and support for Aboriginal or multicultural children and young people who may be in your care.

Every home is different, and children and young people can be overwhelmed if the routines in your home are vastly different to what they were used to. All homes work differently and have certain rules, routines, values and behaviours that suit the family, and you may need to help a child or young person navigate these.

They may include:

- taking shoes off at the front door
- getting lunch boxes out of schoolbags
- hanging things on bedroom walls
- doing homework before or after dinner
- picking up after themselves
- keeping bedrooms tidy.

Within reason, negotiate the 'house rules' to facilitate buy-in from the child or young person, remembering not to assume they will know how to complete the household tasks you expect of them.

Children and young people also need to feel heard as they are an important member of your family, even if the roles or way your family functions is different to what they may be used to. Listening to the child or young person helps them feel connected. Feeling heard helps them begin to take ownership over their life, empowering them to build self-confidence and self-esteem.

If you are non-Aboriginal family member caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, you will need to maintain their culture and identity. This may include incorporating cultural elements within house rules where appropriate. Maintaining relationships with extended family networks will be critical.

# Children and young people in your care

Children and young people flourish and achieve their potential in an environment that provides safety, security, consistency and love.

The children and young people in your care have typically experienced abuse, neglect or other traumatic experiences. These experiences have harmful effects for them, often impacting on their behaviour and emotions, and on relationships with others. Traumatic

experiences, such as family violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect, also impact on the way they perceive themselves and make sense of the world.

Children and young people coming into out-of-home care have usually experienced significant disruption and loss in their lives. Often key relationships and connections have been disrupted, and they may have experienced disconnections from their family members, school and community. Loss, grief, shame and guilt can be very common emotions for them to experience.

The child or young person may not know how long they will be with you and may be anxious, which can lead to difficult behaviours. It is important not to make promises, such as telling them they will live with you forever.

For Aboriginal children and young people coming into your care, an important consideration is the impact of intergenerational trauma, as a result of poor past government welfare practices that saw the forced removal of Aboriginal children and young people and long-term disconnection from their families, communities, country and culture.

Having a routine and receiving consistent and nurturing responses are important for children and young people. It allows them to start challenging their beliefs that adults cannot be trusted and are not worthy of love and care, and they can learn to trust that you will care for them.

The children and young people who come into your care will potentially have periods of emotional and behavioural difficulty. This is to be expected and is a reflection of the challenges and trauma they have faced. Your ability to provide consistent environmental and emotional responses will help them to adjust.

# Challenging relationships and family dynamics

As a kinship carer, you will face unique challenges when you are trying to build a relationship with a vulnerable child or young person, while also managing family dynamics. Kinship care will usually involve connection with the child or young person's parents and other family members, and you will be attempting to re-establish or maintain that connection for the benefit of the child or young person.

In some circumstances, family contact may be so fraught with difficulties and challenges that establishing or maintaining family contact may not be possible. Pre-existing tensions and hostilities within the family may impact on you and the child or young person's wellbeing.

Some carers report that attempting to deal with family dynamics is the hardest part of their caring role – one that impacts significantly on their own emotional and physical wellbeing. This may involve navigating changing relationships with members of your own family, or managing your feelings about a family member who may be the parent of the child or young person.

Please discuss your circumstances with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you are experiencing difficulties with family dynamics that may be impacting your role as a carer. You can also contact Kinship Carers Victoria or your local ACCO for support.

### Providing day-to-day care

As the primary carer, you are responsible for helping the child or young person to settle into your home and to provide for their day-to-day care, which can include:

- supporting them to maintain contact with their parents and other significant people in their lives
- making sure they understand daily routines
- supporting them through any change in routine or plans
- if not already known, finding out what they like to do and encouraging these activities
- helping them to get ready for childcare, kindergarten or school
- getting them to and from local childcare, kindergarten or school, or supporting them in using public transport when they are old enough and competent, and discussing these plans in an age-appropriate way
- letting the childcare, kindergarten or school know if there is anything they need to be aware of, and responding to calls from them
- ensuring school attendance, providing positive reinforcement and supporting them to pursue good educational outcomes

- exploring opportunities within school to enhance their educational experience, and exploring options for post-school education, including higher education
- respecting their culture and facilitating their access to culture and Country
- supporting them to participate in cultural traditions and practice, and to intertwine them into their home life
- supporting them to attend community and cultural activities
- setting clear boundaries so they know what is expected in relation to behaviour, and learn that these boundaries are there to provide them with safety and stability
- helping them settle for bed, being aware that night time is often difficult, especially in a new home, and comforting them through nightmares
- supporting arranged contact with their family
- helping them learn how to speak up in an appropriate way and get involved in their lives
- teaching them independent living skills when they are ready – such as making a sandwich, doing dishes, cooking, making their bed and budgeting
- helping a young person to work out what they want to do when they are older, building their aspirations and helping them develop a positive self-image.

As you get to know and understand the child or young person in your care, you will be able to add more ideas to this list that will fit their needs, likes and dislikes. Good communication is essential to all decision making and will

support the child or young person to feel respected, acknowledged and empowered about what is happening in their lives.

# **Making decisions**

Who can make decisions and how decisions are made about the child or young person in your care is determined by the Act.

When a child or young person is in out-of-home care, there are a number of people on their care team who share responsibilities for doing the things that parents generally do for their own children.

### Day-to-day decisions

As a kinship carer, you will make decisions every day about the child or young person in your care, such as the clothes they wear, their routine and their bedtime. You have both the right and the responsibility to make these day-to-day decisions in the child or young person's best interests. It is important that you consider their preferences and culture when making these decisions.

Although you do not require authorisation to make day-to-day decisions, the child or young person's care team is there to support you in these decisions if required.

Day-to-day decisions could include:

 school drop offs and pickups – you can make a decision about whether the child or young person in your care is dropped off or

- picked up by someone in your community, considering the risks in the same way any parent would for their own children
- babysitting this is considered occasional child minding and is usually for a period of hours at a time. Babysitters are not formally assessed and approved carers, so they are not eligible for a care allowance. Note that overnight stays and respite are different arrangements than occasional babysitting. You can make decisions about the frequency and suitability of the babysitting arrangements and discuss any concerns you have with child protection or your agency
- pocket money the care allowance is designed to contribute to the day-to-day costs of caring, including pocket money, which can help children and young people to learn about the value of money and how to budget. It can also give them a sense of independence as they decide how to spend it.

#### Authorisation to make other decisions

In addition to making day-to-day decisions, you may be authorised by the child protection or Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care case planner (a team manager in child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency) to make other decisions about specific issues for the child or young person. This process supports you with normalising their experiences, and facilitates access to similar care and opportunities available to other children and young people.

The types of decisions you may be authorised to make are determined by:

- the type of protection order in place
- the child or young person's case plan
- the Care and Placement Plan (Looking After Children framework).

The case planner may, with recommendations from the child or young person's care team, authorise you to make specific decisions about a particular child or young person that are in their best interests. A separate authorisation is required for each child or young person in your care, and a new authorisation is required if they move placements or a new child protection order is made.

Authorisation may occur as part of the initial case plan, or at any point in the case planning cycle. A case plan is the formal plan that guides assessment, planning and action by child protection and other agencies involved. You will receive a copy of the authorisation document signed by the case planner. This is called an instrument of authorisation, and specifies the decisions and timeframes you are given authority to make decisions on. You will also receive an information sheet detailing carer authorisation processes from child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency.

An authorisation remains in place while the child or young person lives with you for the duration of the protection order, unless the authorisation is revoked by the case planner. Typical reasons an authorisation may be

revoked include the child leaving your care, a kinship carer deciding they no longer wish to have certain authorisations, or because of other concerns that have developed during the placement. You and anyone with a copy of the authorisation (for example, childcare or school) will be advised in writing if the authorisation is revoked.

Communicating with the child protection worker, the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care worker or agency case manager about the needs of the child or young person and your family will ensure that situations requiring authorisation can be responded to in a timely manner to minimise disruption. If you are unsure whether you have the authority to make a specific decision, clarify this with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

#### Short-term decisions requiring authorisation

You will need authorisation to make short-term decisions, regardless of the type of order the child or young person is on.

Where you have a child or young person in your care on an interim accommodation or a family reunification order, parents are to be involved in decisions that affect their child or young person as far as possible. While child protection consults with parents, the department can make a decision on an issue that is not a major long-term issue without the agreement of the parent.

#### Short-term decisions can include:

- routine medical (including immunisation) and dental care
- treatment of a chronic medical condition with an established treatment plan, authorising the carer to arrange treatment consistent with the plan
- school activities, excursions and work experience
- school camps within Victoria
- participation in activities sports, cultural and social clubs within Victoria
- social events and overnight stays within Victoria
- activities associated with the cultural plan
- haircuts to maintain current style in a healthy condition (a 'trim')
- taking the child or young person interstate for appointments and to access services (for carers close to interstate borders).

### Long-term decisions requiring authorisation

The department or authorised Aboriginal agency cannot make a decision about a major long-term issue in relation to the child or young person, if the parent who has parental responsibility for them disagrees with the decision.

Authorisation for you to make long-term decisions will not be made when the child or young person is on an interim accommodation or family reunification order, unless:

- in a specific situation where the court orders it, or
- the department has the authority.

When caring for a child or young person where the Secretary (the department) or Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency has sole parental responsibility (care by Secretary and long-term care orders), you may be authorised by child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency to make long-term decisions for the child or young person.

These authorisations are most likely to be appropriate where a child or young person is in long-term care and living with a long-term or permanent carer. In these circumstances, parents are still encouraged to be involved in decisions about the child or young person's life as an ongoing positive connection to family is vitally important for a child's identity, social and emotional development. For Aboriginal children and young people, this connection is broader and includes connection to culture and Country.

Long-term decisions may include:

- haircuts (more than maintaining current style in a healthy condition)
- enrolling a child or young person in a school
- approving the young person's Year 11 and 12 subject choices
- a change in education provider (such as moving schools)
- activities relevant to the cultural plan for an Aboriginal child or young person.

### What to consider when making decisions

### Overnight stays away from your home

All children and young people should have opportunities to participate in normal and acceptable, age-appropriate activities, such as an overnight stay at a friend's home. You are expected to act as a responsible parent would when making decisions about where the child or young person in your care can go, or where they can be left without your direct supervision.

When you make a decision, you should consider their age and developmental stage. In general, you can decide if a child (over four years) or young person in your care can stay overnight with a friend, without the need for police checks on the adults in the household where they are to stay. In practice, it is considered unlikely that any preschool-aged child would stay overnight without their carer.

See the **overnight stays policy** in the Child Protection Manual for further information, instruction and advice at <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/overnight-stays">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/overnight-stays</a>.

#### Interstate travel

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency must approve any interstate travel of a child or young person who is subject to a protection order (other than a permanent care order). Travel will not be approved for children or young people on interim accommodation

orders, unless it is a condition of the order or every party gives consent. However, if you live near an interstate border and travel across the border is part of your daily routine, authorisation for taking a child or young person into another state can be approved when the child or young person is on an interim accommodation order.

For children and young people on protection orders, interstate travel for a particular purpose can be specified in a carer authorisation. If you think the need for interstate travel with the child or young person may arise while they are in your care, discuss this with their child protection worker or agency case manager, so that authorisation can be requested in advance.

Aboriginal children and young people may have family, cultural and Country connections in other parts of the nation. This should be considered as part of the child or young person's cultural plan and return to Country plan.

Authorisation for other interstate travel may be requested, for example, where you regularly holiday across the border, or where it is known that the school camp for the child or young person's year level will be interstate.

If you live near an interstate border and travel is part of your daily routine, you may be authorised to take the child into another state as part of your usual routine.

### School photographs

Consent forms for a school, sporting or community activity may seek agreement for the child or young person's photograph to be taken and included in a class photo or in a school newsletter, newspaper, or similar.

You may consent to these photographs provided that:

- there is no risk to the child or young person of their location being revealed (if the placement needs to remain undisclosed, consent should not be given)
- this will not lead to identification that the child or young person is involved with the Children's Court. Be mindful that mention of their care arrangement could lead to such identification. See *Privacy and confidentiality* later in this chapter for more detail.

#### High-risk activities and signing consent forms

Before giving your consent for a child or young person to attend a high-risk activity (such as horse riding, rock climbing, abseiling or water skiing), you need to discuss this with their child protection worker or agency case manager.

If you are authorised to sign consent forms for an activity, and the consent form includes an indemnity or immunity clause that is intended to apply if the child or young person is harmed while participating in the activity, there are things you need to carefully consider before signing this form, including:

- the level of risk and the safety arrangements in place
- whether the activity is appropriate for the child or young person
- what a responsible parent would do in the circumstances.

If you have any doubts, consult child protection or your agency before signing. The department can provide legal advice if necessary.

#### Finance

You are not authorised to make decisions that commit funding by child protection or the agency. You need to follow existing arrangements for any approval of expenditure beyond the scope of the care allowance. See *Chapter 6. Financial support for kinship carers* for more information about the care allowance.

# **Obtaining official documents**

#### Birth certificate

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency can apply for a child or young person's birth certificate through Births, Deaths and Marriages, depending on the order the child or young person is on and the associated permission requirements. A copy of the protection order is required, as well as an authorising letter from the person who has parental responsibility for the child or young person, being the parent or the Secretary

of the department or Principal Officer of an authorised Aboriginal agency. Speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about applying for a birth certificate.

If the Secretary of the department or Principal Officer of an authorised Aboriginal agency does not have parental responsibility, the parents of the child or young person should be encouraged to obtain a birth certificate, if they have not already done so. To apply for a birth certificate on behalf of someone else, you will need to prove that you are authorised to do so from the parent, legal custodian or guardian.

If it is identified that the child or young person's birth has not been registered, it is important that this occurs as soon as possible.

Contact **Births, Deaths and Marriages** for more information on 1300 369 367 or visit <a href="https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/">https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/</a>.

A Koorie relationships officer is available at Births, Deaths and Marriages to assist Koorie customers who need help.

For further information, email <BDMIndigenousAccess@justice.vic.gov.au> or call 1300 369 367.

### **Passport**

Obtaining the documents required for a passport application can be a lengthy process. There are requirements for obtaining the written consent of all people with parental responsibility, although the circumstances vary, depending on the type of protection order the child or young person is on.

As part of a passport application, evidence of the child or young person's parent's Australian citizenship is required. If this is not available, child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will need to apply to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection for proof of citizenship, which can take several weeks.

Once the application for a passport is lodged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the normal processing time for a passport application is six to eight weeks. The arrangements for the urgent issue of a passport do not apply to children and young people in out-of-home care on child protection orders.

If the child or young person in your care is on a protection order, you will need to seek approval from the case planner to take them overseas, and you should not make any arrangements for travel or accommodation until you have their passport.

#### **Confirmation of Aboriginality**

Some Aboriginal services may ask for a letter confirming a person's Aboriginality to access their services. If a child or young person in your care cannot access a service without a confirmation of Aboriginality letter, contact their child protection worker or agency case manager, as there are processes in place with ACCOs to apply for one.

A letter of Confirmation of Aboriginality acknowledges that an ACCO has confirmed there is evidence that a person:

- is of Aboriginal descent
- identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- is accepted as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island community.

If a child or young person does not have this letter, it does not mean they are not Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

#### **Useful resources**

- Authorising carers to make certain decisions information for carers of children and young people, where the Secretary has sole parental responsibility in the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/administration/authorising-carers">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/administration/authorising-carers</a>
- ▶ Birth certificates for more information visit the **Births, Deaths and Marriages** website <a href="https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/">https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/</a> or call 1300 369 367
- ▶ Koorie relationships officer at Births, Deaths and Marriages <a href="https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/koori-services/culturally-sensitive-services">https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/koori-services/culturally-sensitive-services</a> or call 1300 369 367
- Overnight stays the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/overnight-stays">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/overnight-stays</a>
- ▶ Passports for more information, see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/travel/passports">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/travel/passports</a>

#### **Cyber safety**

The use of the internet by children and young people is a part of their lives. Cyber safety is the safe and responsible use of information and communication technology. There is a range of resources that provide advice on keeping children and young people safe in the world of online and digital technology. This includes information about the consequences of online actions, knowing what to do if things go wrong, and understanding online security. This information can help you guide the children and young people in your care to use technology responsibly.

Check the age restrictions for social networking or games. Some social networking sites are created especially for children under the age of 13, but most mainstream sites like Facebook and Instagram require the user to be 13 or older. You must not approve access to a social media site if the child or young person is younger than the age restriction for a particular site.

It is helpful to stay involved, to monitor the child or young person's use of technology, and encourage them to think before they put anything online or while making new friends. Set up your own account and learn about privacy settings. See *useful resources* for where to go for more information.

#### Sexual exploitation online

You need to be aware of the potential danger to children and young people in your care of being sexually exploited online. Evidence shows that children and young people in out-of-home care are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Online predators can use common tools to gain trust and interest through sites on topics that appeal to children and young people, such as modelling, acting, dating and gaming.

Careful monitoring of their internet use can help to keep them safe.

ThinkUKnow is a free, evidence-based cyber safety program that provides accessible cyber safety education to carers and teachers through schools and organisations across Australia. They highlight that young people are quick to take up the latest developments in technology and are often the first to know when something new comes along.

You may wish to talk to the child or young person in your care and see what applications they use to have fun online. You are encouraged to learn more about the ways they are using technology positively, rather than just being concerned about the potential misuse of technology. It is important to have a balanced view of the role technology plays in all our lives.

Talk to them about the need to be safe. Explain why they should never agree to send photos of themselves, stream live videos of themselves, or provide their phone number or street address to people they meet online.

#### Privacy and confidentiality

It is an offence under the Act for a carer to disclose to another person information gained when deciding to care for, or to assist in caring for, a child or young person, unless the disclosure is for the purpose of providing appropriate care.

It is also an offence under the Act to publish information that could lead to the identification of a person as being involved with Children's Court proceedings or on a Children's Court order. An example would be posting this information on social media platforms, such as Facebook. Talk to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you are unsure about an action you want to take.

The information you receive about the child or young person in your care and their parents is highly confidential, and should not be shared with friends, neighbours and others in your social or community network.

If you need to share information with people involved with the child or young person, for example, a doctor or teacher, only give out as much information as necessary to assist them to deal with the issue at hand.

Check the terms and conditions of the social media platforms you are using, and make sure

you set the strongest possible privacy settings to limit viewers of your Facebook page or other electronic media that you use, and allow the child or young person in your care to use.

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 and the Health Records Act 2001 also contain provisions to protect and promote human rights, privacy, and fair and responsible handling of information between government, agencies and individuals.

It is important to consider where you store the personal and health information of the child or young person in your care. If a locked draw is not available, ensure the documents are kept as securely as possible.

If you have any questions about information you can share, you should speak with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

#### **Useful resources**

- Publication of identifying details Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/</a>
  advice-and-protocols/advice/critical-incidents/publication-identifying-details>
- ▶ Cyber safety advice:
  - ▶ ThinkUKnow <a href="https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/">https://www.thinkuknow.org.au/>
  - Office of the eSafety Commissioner <a href="https://www.esafety.gov.au/">https://www.esafety.gov.au/</a>
  - The Department of Education and Training Bully Stoppers initiative <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/acmivideo.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/acmivideo.aspx</a>
  - Australian Federal Police <www.afp.gov.au/policing/child-protection-operations/online-exploitation>
- Information sheet 4. Privacy and photographs

# Acknowledging and responding to different behaviours

As a kinship carer, you will need to navigate the full range of normal child developmental behaviours, which can be both rewarding and difficult at times. The constant negotiation over day-to-day activities, such as meals, bed times, going out rules and getting up on time, is a normal part of caring for any child or young person.

Providing safe and responsive caring is critical to improving positive outcomes for a child or young person and helping them develop the skills they need to grow, develop, make friends, and be successful at school and at home. You play a key role in assisting them to develop positive behaviours that help them get along with others.

All children and young people who are in out-of-home care have experienced some level of trauma in their lives, which can have a significant impact on their behaviour. Disability, developmental delays, mental health, drug and alcohol use, and their environment can also affect behaviour. The fact that they are unable to live with their parents can have a significant impact on their psychological and emotional wellbeina.

It is helpful to remember that the effects of past experiences often shape behaviours, which are the child or young person's way of communicating or dealing with a situation, in the best way they know how.

#### Impact of trauma on behaviour

Understanding the impact of childhood trauma on behaviour is important when caring for the children and young people in your care. Trauma can impact on their body, memory, emotions and relationships, as well as on the way they interact with the world through their behaviour.

It can help to have an understanding of how trauma impacts a child or young person's development, and the way they can internalise (direct towards themselves) or externalise (act out) their behaviour. Speak to their child protection worker or agency case manager regarding how you can learn more about the impact of trauma. If you are caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, ask about culturally informed trauma training.

As a result of past trauma, many children and young people in out-of-home care face difficulties with:

- relationship skills the ability to engage with others, navigate friendships and work as a team, to trust others and resolve conflict
- learning and decision making solving problems or tackling challenges, attention, concentration, organisation, making safe choices and awareness of danger
- managing emotions the ability to stay in control, identify feelings and regulate emotions
- social awareness understanding of social rules and empathy towards others
- self-awareness knowing their strengths and limitations.

A child or young person may seek to re-enforce their belief that you will eventually reject them, and engage in behaviour they know will upset you.

Understanding the impact of trauma can help explain behaviours that they may have adopted in order to survive. It can also help you to respond to them in a sensitive and responsive way. With consistency, understanding and time, you and the care team can work together to help them heal, become more self-aware and strengthen their self-worth.

Child development trends and trauma tables have been collated to provide a guide to the developmental ages and stages of children and young people, providing indicators of trauma, and practical advice for caring for children and young people of different ages. The tables cover the ages 0–12 months, 1–3 years, 5–7 years, 7–9 years, 9–12 years and 12–18 years. They can be found in the Child Protection Manual in the section on the **Best interests case practice model** at <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model</a>.

Speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about training and resources that you can both access for support in dealing with challenging behaviours.

#### Transgenerational trauma

The impact of transgenerational trauma is still being felt by Aboriginal children, families and communities today. Due to the impact of the Stolen Generations and past government policies, many Aboriginal people were disconnected from their families and communities. Transgenerational trauma is when the grief and loss from one generation is passed to future generations, and over time, layers of trauma build up, impacting on people and their communities. See *Information sheet 7* for more information, and *Chapter 9* for information and resources on how to provide culturally informed care.

#### Loss and grief

Children and young people in out-of-home care are highly likely to have experienced loss and grief, which can be overlooked by those around them, and masked as difficult, defiant or withdrawn behaviour.

The experiences of loss can occur from:

- the removal from parents, siblings, extended family and community
- the denial of culture
- not growing up in their community or being recognised as part of the community
- severing of significant relationships and friendships
- multiple moves and changes in carers and support staff
- the loss of pets, changes in houses, neighbourhoods and schools.

### Helping a child or young person deal with loss and grief

Things that can help a child or young person move through their feelings of loss and grief include:

- reminders that they are not to blame for the loss
- opportunities to remember and talk about their losses
- photos of their immediate and extended family, friends, pets and the associated memories
- additional support and understanding if further grief occurs through missed or cancelled contact with parents, siblings or other family members
- learning to understand their triggers
- helping them work out what their emotional outlets are
- connection to their community and culture
- speaking positively about their family, cultural group or community
- supporting other family contacts.

#### Forming attachments

The type of care that a child or young person receives impacts significantly on the way they respond to the world. Attachment is the deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and distance.

A child or young person can form attachments and connections with different people they come into contact with. In Aboriginal culture, children and young people form attachments to many people in their community who are responsible for providing care, such as aunts, uncles and Elders.

It is through the child or young person's experience of relationships that they learn how to interact and behave, in order to get their needs met. Sensitive and responsive caring from you builds a secure relationship, and promotes physical, behavioural, social and emotional development. This includes a greater capacity for them to be able to regulate their emotions, have positive interactions with others and develop better coping skills.

You can improve the experience of relationships for the child or young person in your care through offering comfort when they are distressed, giving warm, interested responses to their wish to communicate or play, and demonstrating empathy and acceptance of their point of view.

#### Responding to behaviours

Consistency and nurturing responses are important for children and young people coming into your care, as they benefit from predictability and routine. This will allow them to start the process of believing that adults can be trusted, that they can rely on adults to care for them, and that they are worthy of love and care from adults.

Positive ways of managing behaviour focus on understanding the behaviour for a child or young person, and teaching and supporting them to learn acceptable behaviours through strategies that include:

- role modelling appropriate behaviour
- positive reinforcement, such as praise
- skill development, such as problem solving, communication and social skills
- creating an environment that supports their needs
- helping them to identify, talk about and manage their feelings
- engaging them in decisions that impact on them
- increasing positive interactions with them, and providing opportunities for them to access different activities that build on their strengths and interests.

A trauma-informed approach to providing care focuses on teaching the child or young person new skills to help recover from the impact of trauma. The care team provides an opportunity to explore behaviours, and provide support and approaches for trauma-informed care. This includes strategies to prevent challenging behaviour from occurring, and positive ways to quickly and safely manage behaviour when it does occur.

Understanding the child or young person's past experiences and the impact of trauma can help you remain calm and in tune with their underlying pain. The challenge for you is to try and work out what triggers their behaviour, and what is going on for them to cause the behaviour. For example, they may be displaying aggressive behaviour as a result of upcoming contact, and fear or confusion associated with this, or they may be displaying learnt

behaviours that were previously rewarded, to gain what they wanted or that enabled them to feel safe.

For Aboriginal children or young people, culture is a part of healing and a sensitive, trauma-informed approach to caring must include connection to culture. See *Chapter 9* for more information and resources on how you can support the child or young person's connection to culture.

It is during your regular day-to-day interactions with the child or young person in your care that you can praise their achievements, share moments and celebrate culture, so they can experience a sense of belonging. This helps them develop a stronger and more positive sense of self, and will have the greatest impact in influencing positive behaviour.

During everyday life, a child or young person can:

- start to put words to their confusing emotions
- learn to trust
- realise they do not necessarily need chaos to function
- develop skills to identify, talk about and regulate feelings
- regularly hear about things that they are doing well.

As a carer, you may need more support to understand and respond to a child or young person's behaviour. In serious cases where this behaviour may result in harm to themselves or others, help may be needed to support you and them with a plan that outlines the best way to respond and supports behaviour change.

Speak with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about getting the help you need.

#### **Emergency use of physical restraint**

As a kinship carer, you have a legal obligation to exercise reasonable care when doing things (acts) or not doing things (omissions) that could expose the child or young person you are responsible for, to a reasonably foreseeable risk of injury. This is called the common law duty of care.

Sometimes, as a carer, there may be emergency situations where you may need to physically restrain a child or young person against their wishes. Your duty of care to the child or young person permits you to use physical restraint in situations where it is reasonable and necessary, as a last resort, to prevent harm to them or another person. For example, as a carer you may need to pull a child back or grab a child's arm who is about to run onto a busy road or to stop one child from physically harming another. The action that you take must be reasonable, given the situation and the likely harm to the child or young person.

The use of physical restraint can cause injury or harm to children and young people, and those performing the restraint, and can seriously impact your relationship with them.

Monitoring and reporting of physical restraint is required to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people, and carers. If you have or think you may have used physical

restraint, let the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager know, so they can follow up as required and provide you, the child or young person with any help or support required.

The use of unreasonable physical restraint will likely need to be investigated by the department or your agency and may need to be reported to Victoria Police for investigation.

### Responding to adolescent high risk behaviour

Adolescence is a time when young people sometimes challenge and test limits. Many young people who are involved with child protection may have behaviours that are difficult and can sometimes strain the resources of those caring for them.

It is important to take a team approach to risk and crisis prevention for these young people. Any high-risk behaviour should be discussed in the care team, and plans should be developed and incorporated into the care and placement plan to include:

- roles and responsibilities
- who is to be informed
- who will manage the situation
- what is the agreed plan of action, including involvement of other professionals.

You should speak to the young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you are concerned that the young person in your care is engaging in high-risk behaviour.

#### Responding to disclosures of abuse

When a child or young person tells you they have been abused, they may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry and powerless. You, in turn, may feel a sense of outrage, disgust and sometimes disbelief about the information they are sharing. This can be especially difficult for you if the disclosure reveals concerns about a family member. However, it is important to remain calm and in control of your feelings, in order to reassure them that something will be done to keep them safe. It is also important for you not to confront the person.

Key things to keep in mind are to:

- be patient and allow the child or young person time to tell you in their own words
- reassure the child or young person they are not responsible for the abuse and that you believe them
- tell the child or young person what you need to do next, such as inform child protection or agency (if involved).

For more detail, see *Information sheet 3*. *Responding to a disclosure of abuse*.

#### Impact of behaviours on carers

The way a child or young person behaves in your care can be distressing and challenging at times. There may be times when their behaviours lead to injury to you, themselves or another family member, or damage to property. Your safety and the safety of people around you, including your family and the child or young person in distress is very important.

Try to remain calm, even if you do not feel that way on the inside.

Recognising your own responses to challenging behaviours is important, as it will help you work out how best to care for your ongoing emotional and physical wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of your family.

It is not unusual to have strong reactions to some of the behaviours shown by the child or young person in your care, and they can also trigger memories of your own childhood or unresolved issues. Being open to seeking support is a very positive thing for both of you.

Some carers choose to access support for their own triggers and reactions, through counselling or mental health services, to provide greater understanding and skills around responding to challenging behaviours and situations.

You should speak to child protection or your agency if you need support, or raise any issues you are experiencing with the care team.

# When a child or young person leaves your care

Children and young people leave out-of-home care for many different reasons. This could be a planned reunification with their parents or other family that occurs over time, a planned move to an alternative placement or if they leave when turning 18 years of age.

Endings can also happen unexpectedly through a decision made by the Court, or you may have made a very difficult decision, in consultation with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, after extensive unsuccessful attempts to settle a child or young person into your home. It could also be an unplanned move due to your needs, or the child or young person's needs.

Feelings and reactions associated with loss and grief are common when the child or young person you have been caring for leaves your care. You may wish to think about what role or ongoing relationship you may have with the child or young person if they leave your care.

It is important to talk through the impact of placements ending with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, or you can contact Kinship Carers Victoria or your local ACCO for support.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care on the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency website <a href="https://www.vacca.org/">https://www.vacca.org/</a>
- ▶ **Child development and trauma** in the Child Protection Manual *<http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/* our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/child-development-and-trauma>
- ▶ Best interests case practice the best interest case practice model provides guidance on how trauma can affect development, and suggests some useful ways of working with children and forming attachments. See the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model</a>
- ► **Kinship Carers Victoria** for information and advice about self-care strategies <a href="http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/">http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/</a>



### 5. Planning and decision making

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### 5. Planning and decision making

# Planning for the child or young person

All children and young people in out-of-home care need a coordinated and clear approach to managing their care. As a kinship carer, you will be involved in planning and decision making for the child or young person in your care. Planning is the process of making significant decisions in relation to a child or young person during child protection intervention.

Case planning is a formal process that occurs following substantiation of abuse or neglect, and the case plan document outlines the major decisions about the child or young person.

The child protection worker or agency case manager will work, where appropriate, with those involved with the child or young person to inform this planning, such as you, the parents and professionals. Care team meetings are required to be held regularly and are helpful to ensure everyone, including the child or young person if appropriate, and you, contributes to these planning processes.

In addition to case plans, Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care are required to have a cultural plan that maintains and develops their Aboriginal identity, and sets out how they are to remain connected to their

Aboriginal community and culture. The cultural plan is developed at the same time as the case plan. It is the responsibility of child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency and the care team to ensure it is developed and implemented.

The Looking After Children framework offers a set of tools to help with the planning and recording of the child or young person's day-to-day life, and helps ensure their needs are met. More information about the Looking After Children framework is outlined later in this chapter.

The case plan and cultural plan should provide a consistent, inclusive and collaborative approach to meeting the child or young person's safety, stability and developmental needs while they are in care.

#### Permanency objective

Permanency refers to an ongoing care arrangement for a child or young person that promotes their safety, development and sense of belonging. Permanency includes all decisions made about a child or young person's permanent living and care arrangement, regardless of whether a child remains in, or returns to, parental care or needs an ongoing out-of-home care arrangement.

#### Case plans

The permanency objective and case plan are intrinsically connected as significant decisions made by child protection (the case plan) are to reflect, support and work towards the permanency objective.

A case plan must include one of the permanency objectives, which are listed in order of preference, being:

- family preservation ensuring that a child or young person who is in the care of a parent remains in their care
- family reunification ensuring that a child or young person who has been removed from the care of a parent is returned to their parent's care
- adoption planning for a child or young person's adoption under the Adoption Act 1984 (note there are very few adoptions in Victoria)
- permanent care arranging a permanent care placement of a child or young person with a permanent carer or carers
- long-term out-of-home care placing a child or young person in a stable longterm placement with a specified carer or carers, or another suitable long-term care arrangement if this is not possible.

A case plan outlines what is required to meet the needs of the child or young person. It covers the significant decisions about their:

- care arrangements
- contact with their parents and siblings, and other family members
- cultural support

- childcare, education or employment
- healthcare
- developmental needs
- financial decisions
- other significant decisions, such as crisis management.

Children and young people placed in out-of-home care must have a case plan and these are reviewed annually at a minimum. The case plan is prepared following substantiation – when a child or young person is found to be in need of protection.

The child or young person's case manager is responsible for developing the case plan, which is then endorsed by the case planner. Where appropriate, the child or young person, their parents, you the carer, the agency and relevant professionals have input into developing the case plan with child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency.

The Act states that you should be consulted as part of the decision-making process and given an opportunity to contribute to the process. Your role in contributing to the case plan is particularly important where you have vital information about the child or young person in your care.

The child or young person's case manager must, according to the Act, provide information to the parents about the child or young person, unless they are over 12 years old and do not consent to this, or it is not in the best interest of the child or young person to do so. There are also times when the Court orders against this.

# Family-led decision-making meetings

Families are offered family-led decision-making meetings when protective concerns have been substantiated and further intervention is required, or when the child or young person is on a protective order. Where possible, family-led decision making should be the process used to develop a case plan.

Aboriginal family-led decision-making meetings are a culturally based approach to decision making, and offered specifically for Aboriginal children and young people. They occur in the same circumstances as family-led decision-making meetings. Ideally, they will occur at substantiation, where child protection is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the child or young person is in need of protection.

For Aboriginal children and young people, this meeting will develop the case plan and help with developing the cultural plan to identify family and to maintain connection to community and family. If the case plan is due for a review, or if there is a significant change in the child or young person's circumstances that warrant a review of the case plan, a further meeting is offered to the family.

The inclusion of kinship carers and the agency case manager in the meeting should be considered on a case-by-case basis, and the meeting convener will need to discuss your involvement with the child or young person and their family. However, regardless of whether you attend or not, you have an important role

in contributing advice or views to the meeting, and supporting the child or young person before and after the meeting, including managing any anxieties or concerns they may have about attending and participating at the meeting.

#### Case management

Case management is the term used to describe the coordination and delivery of services provided to a child or young person in out-of-home care. The case manager is responsible for ensuring the child or young person's case plan and cultural plan are implemented. Case management may sit with child protection or be contracted to an agency that provides kinship services.

Regardless of who is the case manager, decision making about changes to the case plan remains the responsibility of the case planner. There are times when a child or young person may not have an allocated child protection worker or case manager, and queries will be managed by the child protection team manager or a manager within an authorised Aboriginal agency.

#### **Care teams**

A care team is required for every child and young person in out-of-home care, except for permanent care and adoption placements. The purpose of a care team is to manage the day-to-day care and best interests of the child and young person, in accordance with the overall case plan.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency is responsible for establishing and leading the care team, if supervising and supporting the kinship placement. If case management is contracted, the agency is responsible for establishing and leading the care team.

The care team aims to strengthen communication between the important people in the child or young person's life. Members of the care team also work together to achieve the best outcomes for the child or young person.

Care team meetings provide the opportunity for all involved to talk about the progress and achievements of the child or young person. Some care teams meet formally, while others work well with regular discussions and conversations as frequently as required.

If appropriate, the child (if they are old enough) or young person, and their parents will be invited to attend. Involving the child or young person in decisions about their lives empowers them to build self-confidence and self-esteem, and enables them to have a voice and be heard.

#### Care team members

The members of a care team are the people who need to work together to jointly determine and do the things that parents ordinarily do to provide good care. Those members will vary, depending on the needs of the child or young person and their family.

A care team should always include you as the kinship carer and:

- the child or young person's case manager this will be the child protection worker or an agency case manager
- the agency manager if a community service organisation is supporting the placement
- the child or young person's parents (unless there is a very good reason not to include them)
- any other adults who play a significant role in caring for the child or young person
- the child or young person, ideally.

For children and young people in kinship care, engaging parents and extended family members from all sides of the family may be particularly challenging. Family-led decision-making and family mediation may be used to support care team processes in these circumstances.

#### Good communication in a care team

Care teams should have:

- clear, open and regular communication between you, child protection and the agency
- the ability to talk through issues and challenges if they arise and to achieve resolution
- regular discussions (face to face, via email or telephone – formal meetings are not automatically required)
- a responsibility to share information with each other, while making sure to protect the privacy of the child or young person

- documentation of discussions and decisions made where formal meetings occur, including actions and outcomes of the meeting that are distributed to care team members
- the child or young person involved in decision making, where appropriate, about matters affecting their lives.

## Looking After Children framework

The Looking After Children framework, processes and tools assist the care team to more effectively work together to respond to the child or young person's safety, wellbeing and developmental needs while they are in out-of-home care. It is also an opportunity to keep timely records and information about the milestones and key experiences for the child or young person, which can be important if their placement changes or they leave your care, and if they wish to access their records in the future when they are an adult.

For kinship placements supported and supervised by child protection, the Looking After Children framework is embedded in case practice, as well as case planning documentation.

Where case management is contracted to an agency, the service provider providing kinship placement support is responsible for coordinating the Looking After Children processes and completing Looking After Children records with the other care team members and the child or young person.

Kinship carers have a responsibility to contribute information to the Looking after Children records, either through meetings with the child or young person's case manager or via care team meetings.

# Decision making and the Aboriginal Child-Placement Principle

When placing an Aboriginal child or young person in out-of-home care, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in the Act must be adhered to.

The Aboriginal Child-Placement Principle promotes a hierarchy of placement options that are:

- An Aboriginal agency is to be consulted before a child or young person is placed in out-of-home care.
- Wherever possible, the child or young person should be placed with Aboriginal extended family or relatives, and where this is not possible other extended family or relatives.
- If this is not possible, the child or young person may be placed with an Aboriginal family from the child or young person's local community.
- An Aboriginal family from another Aboriginal community is then to be explored.
- Finally, as a last resort, a non-Aboriginal carer situated as close as possible to the child or young person's family is to be considered.

The objectives of the principle are to ensure that recognition is given to an Aboriginal child or young person's right to be raised in their own culture, and to the importance and value of family, extended family, kinship networks, culture and community in raising Aboriginal children and young people.

Under the Act, any decisions, including all case plan decisions made, must protect and promote a child or young person's Aboriginal cultural and spiritual identity and development, by maintaining and building their connection to their Aboriginal family and community.

The Act outlines the Aboriginal Decision-Making Principles, which include that:

- The child or young person's Aboriginal community or respected Aboriginal people are to be consulted, where relevant, on any decision or action taken.
- A meeting should be held, convened by an Aboriginal leader, and where possible, involve the child or young person, parents, extended family and other members of the Aboriginal community, to support decision making.

If an Aboriginal child or young person is placed with a person who is not within an Aboriginal family or community, arrangements must be made to ensure that they have the opportunity for continuing contact with their Aboriginal family, community and culture.

### Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Services

This service provides culturally appropriate advice and consultation regarding all significant decisions about a child or young person's involvement with child protection. Child protection is required to consult with Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Services prior to making any key decisions for Aboriginal children and young people.

#### Cultural plans

The child or young person's cultural plan includes various elements to promote and maintain cultural support for them while they are in out-of-home care.

The care team prepares, implements and reviews the cultural plan. While the case manager (child protection or contracted agency) has the responsibility for the cultural plan being given to the child, the care team is expected to lead and ensure completion of the plan. The child or young person should be included in development of the cultural plan. As the child or young person's primary carer and member of the care team, you are essential in contributing to the development of the cultural plan and ensuring it is implemented.

ACCOs, funded by the department for the provision of cultural planning, are responsible for supporting care teams to develop cultural plans, check the plan for accuracy and

appropriateness from a cultural perspective, and sign the plan. This support is provided through the Senior Advisor – Aboriginal Cultural Planning role, which will actively troubleshoot barriers to completing the cultural plan, and provide the plan to their chief executive officer for endorsement.

The case planner endorses the cultural plan, ensuring it is aligned to the case plan permanency objective.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ **Aboriginal Child Placement Principle** See the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children/responding-aboriginal-children">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children/responding-aboriginal-children</a>
- ▶ **Cultural plans** See the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children/cultural-support-plans">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children/cultural-support-plans</a>
- ▶ Information sharing see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/privacy/information-sharing">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/privacy/information-sharing</a>>
- **Looking After Children framework** see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/service-descriptions/out-home-care/looking-after-children">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/service-descriptions/out-home-care/looking-after-children</a>

# Planning and decision-making timeframes

Many decisions need to be made when caring for a child or young person. There are set timeframes for making decisions, planning and reviewing their situation, and there are different tools used in this planning. Table 1 summarises the planning and review processes, and timelines

Table 1. Timeframes for planning and review processes

Plan name	What is it?	Who completes it?
Case plan	The case plan sets out the permanency objective. It contains all significant decisions about a child or young person, including their care arrangements, contacts, and decisions about their health and education	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency
Case plan reviews	A review of the case plan sets out changes to the child protection case plan or permanency objective, and other significant decisions	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency
Cultural plan	The cultural plan is aligned with the case plan and sets out how an Aboriginal child or young person will maintain and develop their identity and remain connected to their community	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency must make sure the child or young person has a cultural plan, but these are completed by the care team and supported by an ACCO
Essential Information Record – contracted cases (Looking After Children framework)	This holds important current and historical information, such as the child or young person's Medicare number, health alerts and conditions, school details, family members' names and details, important milestones and achievements	Service provider (with drafting input from carers)

How is the plan developed?	Do carers get a copy?	When is it completed?	Timelines
The case plan is developed with parents, and with input from carers and other services. A family-led decision-making meeting can be utilised to support preparation of the plan	Possibly – as the carer of the child or young person	The case plan starts when child protection concerns have been substantiated	A copy of the case plan must be provided to parents and the child or young person (over 10 years), within 21 days of substantiation
It is developed with parents and with input from carers and other services	Possibly – as the carer of the child or young person	All case plans must have a review date of no more than 12 months after it was first made. The case plan can be reviewed earlier if there is a significant change in the child or young person's circumstances	Parents and the child or young person must receive a copy of the new case plan within 14 days of endorsement, or within eight weeks of a protection order being made or extended
The care team develops the cultural plan	Possibly  - original is given to the child or young person, or it may be more appropriate to provide this to the carer	Within 16 weeks of the child or young person entering out-of-home care, the cultural plan is given to the Senior Advisor – Aboriginal Cultural Planning for review	The process should take no more than 19 weeks, by which time the child or young person should have been given their endorsed cultural plan.  Review date of no more than 12 months, or earlier if there is a significant change in the child or young person's circumstances
It contains information gathered through documentation, discussion and care team meetings	Yes	To be commenced within the first two weeks of a child or young person coming into care	The record is updated as new information arises and reviewed every six months

Table 1. Timeframes for planning and review processes (continued)

Plan name	What is it?	Who completes it?
Care and Placement Plan – contracted cases (Looking After Children framework)	The Care and Placement Plan records the detailed agency day-to-day arrangements for the care of the child or young person, and identifies how their long and short-term needs will be met	Service provider (with drafting input from carers)
Care and Transition Plan – contracted cases (Looking After Children framework)	This replaces the Care and Placement Plan once the young person turns 15 years. It covers their day-to-day care as they grow and mature through their adolescence. It also records how they are being helped to prepare for the future and make a successful transition to adulthood	Service provider (with drafting input from carers)
Assessment and Progress Record – contracted cases (Looking After Children framework)	This includes age-related records about the child or young person's development and follow-up action covering the seven Looking After Children domains of health, emotional and behavioural development, education, family and social relationships, identity, social presentation and self-care skills	Service provider (with drafting input from carers)

How is the plan developed?	Do carers get a copy?	When is it completed?	Timelines
Yes – care team meetings	Yes	To be completed within the first two weeks of a child or young person coming into care	The plan is reviewed every six months
Yes – care team meetings	Yes	To be completed within the first two weeks of a young person coming into care or once they attain 15 years of age.	The plan is reviewed every six months
Yes – care team meetings	Yes	Within four-six weeks after the Care and Placement Plan has been completed	The plan is reviewed every six months (for a child under five years), and every 12 months (for a child or young person over five years)



## 6. Financial support for kinship carers

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# 6. Financial support for kinship carers

# Victorian care allowance and other financial support

There is a range of financial supports available for kinship carers, including the care allowance and client-support funding. In addition to this, the Victorian Government provides financial and other supports to assist you and the child or young person in your care (see Table 2).

The Commonwealth Government also provides benefits that are available to the broader community. It is the role of the department, agency and care teams to support carers to identify and access the full range of financial supports available.

The care allowance structure and payment rates that you receive directly from the department are outlined in the **Support for home-based carers in Victoria** page on the department's website at <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>>.

#### Care allowance

The department provides assessed and approved kinship carers, foster carers, permanent carers and special needs local adoptive parents with a care allowance, to assist in providing care for children and young people who cannot live with their parents, following intervention by child protection.

The care allowance contributes to the costs

incurred while providing care and is paid fortnightly by the department.

The care allowance is from the date of endorsed placement of the child or young person, and is provided for each child or young person in care. An endorsed placement is when child protection determines that the placement is required for the safety of the child or young person, and the kinship carer has been assessed and approved.

The care allowance is not a 'payment' for being a carer and is not considered a source of income for the purposes of annual tax returns, testing eligibility for Commonwealth Government allowances or when applying for loans from financial institutions. Care allowance rates are not affected by Centrelink or Commonwealth child support agency payments, or Youth Allowance payments.

Kinship carers assessed and approved by child protection are automatically eligible for the level-one care allowance at the beginning of the placement. Where the child is assessed as having higher needs, carers may be eligible for a higher care allowance level. Please contact the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager to discuss the needs of the child or young person in your care.

A **fact sheet** for carers on the care allowance is available on the department's website at <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>>.

For questions you may have about department care allowances, contact:

The Care Allowance Helpdesk

Department of Health and Human Services

Phone: 1300 552 319 Fax: 1300 788 062

Email: <caregivers.mgt@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

#### **Client support funding**

Client support funding is additional funding that you may be eligible for to help cover the costs for extraordinary expenses. These are for the purchase of specific items or services that exceed the day-to-day costs of what the care allowance contributes to, or to assist with high costs that place an unreasonable financial burden on carers. Where a child or young person has extraordinary needs or needs that are above the day-to-day cost of caring, kinship carers should speak with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager to discuss access to client support funding.

For more information on *client support* funding and support for home-based carers in Victoria, visit the department's website at <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>.

Table 2. Other financial supports linked to the care allowance

Allowance	Purpose	Description
Client expenses	To help address the individual needs of children and young people subject to Victorian child protection intervention and in home-based care arrangements	<ul> <li>Kinship carers can request access to client expenses through the care team planning process or via the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.</li> </ul>
New placement allowance	To assist in meeting the immediate or 'start-up' costs of caring for a child or young person, subject to Victorian child protection intervention	<ul> <li>If a carer is receiving a level-1 care allowance, an additional amount is paid to carers over the first six months of the placement or care arrangement</li> <li>Included in fortnightly care allowance</li> </ul>
Education and medical payment	To assist in meeting the education and health needs of children and young people in out-of-home care	<ul> <li>Included in fortnightly care allowance</li> </ul>

Table 2. Other financial supports linked to the care allowance (continued)

Allowance	Purpose	Description
School attendance allowance	To contribute to meeting the educational costs for a child or young person subject to Victorian child protection intervention	<ul> <li>Two age bands for the allowance are 5–11 years and 12–18 years</li> <li>Quarterly payment is separate to the care allowance and automatically paid to the carer's nominated bank account</li> <li>Paid in arrears to primary or full-time carers, based on the number of days a child or young person has been in the care arrangement</li> </ul>
18 – 21 years and school attending	To provide ongoing support and placement stability to young people completing their secondary education qualification	<ul> <li>Carers must maintain a private         accommodation arrangement within their         home for a young person for whom they         were in receipt of a care allowance on the         date of the young person's 18th birthday</li> <li>Where a young person has turned 18 years         of age and is continuing to attend school         at a senior level (eligibility provisions apply),         the care allowance can be extended up         to 21 years of age when they are school-         attending</li> <li>This extension can occur for the calendar         year in which the young person turns 18, and         for the calendar year beyond which they         turn 18 and up to 21 years of age, if they are         still attending school at a senior level (full         time or part time)</li> <li>The department's Care Allowance Helpdesk         will send a letter out to kinship carers in         advance of the young person's 18th birthday,         advising that the carer may be eligible for         an extension of the care allowance.</li> </ul>

#### Flexible funding for permanent carers

For kinship carers who have converted to a permanent care arrangement, flexible funding can be provided to you, to help meet the additional needs of a child or young person in your care, beyond those met by the care allowance and other available funding sources, at the time a permanent care order is made. The funding is specific to the child or young person.

The funds are to promote continuity of quality care and help address issues that may be a result of abuse or neglect. Funding for new permanent carers is managed by child protection through the permanent care assessment and is to be approved as part of the case plan.

Funding for existing permanent carers is managed by OzChild, in partnership with Permanent Care and Adoptive Families. For more information, contact Permanent Care and Adoptive Families on (03) 9020 1833 or email <info@pcafamilies.org.au>.

#### Victorian Government Carer Card

The Victorian Government Carer Card gives you free and discounted services, including free public transport on Sundays, two return off-peak rail vouchers for travel anywhere within Victoria, and discounted entry to government venues, such as zoos, museums and various tourist attractions. See the *useful resources* section for contact details and where to go for more information.

# Commonwealth Government assistance

The Commonwealth Government provides payments and services to carers who are not the parent, and who provide full-time care for a child or young person.

Centrelink provides payments and services that may assist you to provide care to a child or young person, as well as payments to eligible young people and children, such as the:

- Child Care Benefit helps with the costs of approved or registered childcare
- Child Care Rebate an additional payment to help with child care costs if you are eligible for the Child Care Benefit
- Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance – can help with childcare if you need to search for a job, work, study or other approved activities
- Family Tax Benefit helps with the costs of raising a child or young person
- Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

   can help carers get children and young
   people to school when they live in an isolated
   area, or if the child or young person cannot go
   to an appropriate state school daily, because
   they have a disability or special needs.

Please note that some of these payments require an income assessment for eligibility.

#### Centrelink's Grandparent Advisers

A Grandparent Adviser may be able to assist you if you are a grandparent or relative carer and have questions about eligibility and the assistance available. The adviser can provide information specific to your circumstances, assess your eligibility, and refer you to other services if required.

If you would like to speak to a Grandparent Adviser, you should specifically ask to do so when contacting Centrelink, but note that not all Centrelink office locations have an onsite adviser. You can call any time and leave a message noting the best time to return your call. If you are an existing Centrelink customer,

have your Customer Reference Number handy. Expect to be asked to provide detailed information about you and the child or young person you care for – this is to determine eligibility requirements and the types of assistance that will best suit your situation.

Call the **Grandparent Adviser Line** on freecall 1800 245 965 or visit the Australian Government Department of Human Services website <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/grandparent-advisers">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/grandparent-advisers>

#### Useful resources

▶ Administration of allowances – for queries regarding the administration of department care allowances to carers, contact:

#### The Care Allowances Helpdesk

Department of Health and Human Services Phone: 1300 552 319 Fax: 1300 788 062 Email: <caregivers.mgt@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

- ▶ Care allowances see Support for home-based carers in Victoria on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>
- Flexible funding for existing permanent carers Support for home-based carers in Victoria on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>
- Support from Centrelink for non-parent carers <a href="www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/support-for-non-parent-carers">www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/support-for-non-parent-carers</a>
- ▶ Victorian Government Carer Card Program call the Carer Card Information Line on 1800 901 958 or email <carercard@dhhs.vic.gov.au> or visit <http://carercard.vic.gov.au/>



### 7. Support for kinship carers

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### 7. Support for kinship carers

Being aware of available supports can be crucial for a successful caring relationship. These supports may include:

- emotional support
- physical and practical support
- financial support
- education and learning
- problem-solving support
- cultural support
- community support
- social support.

#### Supervision and support

Kinship carers may initially require support from the child or young person's child protection worker to assist in managing their care needs. You should discuss with the child or young person's child protection worker what support and resources you require, which may include financial or other types of support.

Where kinship care placements have been made and case management remains with child protection, child protection workers are responsible for supervision and support of the placement. For Aboriginal children who are subject to a protection order, an authorised Aboriginal agency may provide child protection services instead of child protection.

Where case management is contracted to an agency, you should speak to the agency case manager about the support available.

#### **Support services**

Supervision and support in kinship care placements is provided by child protection, a community service organisation or ACCO.

#### Victorian kinship care services

The Victorian Government funds community-based kinship care services and Aboriginal kinship services across Victoria, to provide a range of cultural and support services for children and young people in kinship care and their families in the area close to where they live.

ACCOs are funded to provide kinship and cultural connections services, and to facilitate and coordinate Aboriginal kinship carer support and healing groups.

A list of **kinship care service** providers is available on the department's website at <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/kinship-care">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/kinship-care</a> or see *Information sheet 11. Key contacts*.

#### **Kinship Carers Victoria**

Kinship Carers Victoria is the peak body for kinship carers in Victoria. You can contact **Kinship Carers Victoria** for information, advice and support on (03) 9372 2422, email <a href="mailto:rector@grandparents.com.au">director@grandparents.com.au</a> or visit <a href="mailto:rector@grandparents.com.au">http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/>.

#### The Mirabel Foundation

The Mirabel Foundation assists children and young people who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental illicit drug use and are now in the care of extended family. Mirabel provides advocacy, referral, research, practical and emotional assistance to vulnerable children and young people and their kinship carers.

You can contact the **Mirabel Foundation** on (03) 9527 9422, email <a href="mailto:kmirabel@mirabelfoundation.org.au">mirabel@mirabelfoundation.org.au</a> or visit <a href="mailto:kwww.mirabelfoundation.org.au">kwww.mirabelfoundation.org.au</a>.

#### **Permanent Care and Adoptive Families**

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families provides peer support, advocacy, education and support services to ensure better outcomes for children and young people in kinship care, permanent care and adoption.

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families can be contacted on (03) 9020 1833, email <info@pcafamilies.org.au> or visit <www.pcafamilies.org.au/>.

#### Kinship carer support groups

Kinship carer support groups operate in various locations across Victoria. Usually,

there is at least one provided by each community service organisation funded by the Victorian Government to provide kinship services. The frequency of these groups may vary, but all groups have the common aim of sharing information and support for kinship carers.

If you are a new carer, attending a support group is highly recommended. They are great for learning about other services and information available to support your role and the child or young person you care for.

Many carers report that these groups make them feel part of a wider network and reduce the sense of isolation that can accompany this challenging role. They also report feeling supported, connected and 'heard', as they are able to share experiences with and learn from other carers. The structure of the meetings may vary, but all are informal and welcoming, sometimes with guest speakers.

To find your nearest support group, contact Kinship Carers Victoria on (03) 9372 2422.

### Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services

The Victorian Government funds community-based organisations across the state to deliver Child and Family Information, Referral and Support (Child FIRST) and Integrated Family Services for vulnerable children, young people and their families from diverse backgrounds and family compositions. This includes kinship families.

There are 22 Child FIRSTs across the state. Each Child FIRST provides a central intake and referral point to a range of community-based family services and other supports. Child FIRST provides a clear pathway for families to access relevant family services and support, based on their needs.

Referrals in relation to Aboriginal children and families can be made directly to an ACCO.

Raising children and being part of a family can at times be a rewarding and challenging experience for parents, caregivers and families. Integrated Family Services provide a range of interventions and approaches to:

- enhance parenting capacity and skills
- improve parent/s and/or caregiver/s relationship with the children and young people they care for
- promote safety, stability and development of children and young people
- enhance social connectedness.

This may include:

- information, advice and advocacy
- outreach support
- in-home support
- family decision making/family group conferencing
- group work
- counselling
- brokerage
- accessing universal services
- secondary consultation.

A list of contact numbers for a **Child FIRST** based in your local area can be found on

the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/family-support">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/family-support</a>.

#### Looking after yourself

The role of a carer can be very demanding. Being aware of how to manage your stress can improve your wellbeing and may help you in providing care. You are the best person to know what makes you feel emotionally, physically and mentally better, so plan activities to support your health and wellbeing.

There is a range of resources you can access, which may help you identify what would work best for you. See *Information sheet 6*. The impact of caring and looking after yourself.

You could also consider getting support and advice from other carers, child protection, your agency (if involved), Aboriginal community networks and broader support networks, such as Kinship Carers Victoria, which provides a range of support services to carers.

#### Respite and time out

Where a child or young person is residing in a kinship care placement as part of an endorsed case plan, respite can often help you to maintain the quality, viability and longevity of the placement.

Respite care is when arrangements are made for you to spend a night or more away from the child or young person you are caring for, or when it is planned that the child or young person will stay the night away from you. Respite care can be for a night, a weekend or longer, and differs from occasional babysitting or an overnight stay with a friend.

You should discuss respite care with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager in the first instance. Respite care should always be planned well in advance, ideally with another family member, or other well-known and trusted adult, and in consideration of the best interests of the child or young person.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will need to assess that the proposed respite carer is suitable to care for the child or young person, including completing mandatory screening processes, and they will be required to hold a Working with Children Check.

Sometimes, children and young people may need to stay with an assessed and approved foster carer for respite care to occur, if this is in their best interests.

Regular respite may affect your care allowance. Speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about this.

#### **Training**

Training provides an opportunity for you to gain skills and knowledge to support the child or young person in your care. You are encouraged to take part in the training opportunities available, as you will also be able to meet

with other carers, share ideas and discuss challenges you have faced.

Participation in training can support you to care for children and young people with various needs. There is a lot of research and practice advice about understanding trauma, and approaches to supporting children and young people with challenging behaviours. Training in this area may be of particular interest for you.

#### Carer KaFE: Kinship and foster care education

The Carer KaFE is a one-stop shop for training for Victorian statutory kinship and foster carers. An online calendar shows you the face-to-face training available in your area. Online learning, cultural awareness training, accredited training opportunities and conference attendance sponsorship are also supported by the Carer KaFE. There is no cost for carers to access and attend training opportunities.

The Carer KAFE is managed by the Foster Care Association of Victoria, in alliance with Kinship Carers Victoria, VACCA, the Victorian Aboriginal Children & Young People's Alliance and other important organisations supporting kinship carers.

For more information about the Carer KaFE, call (03) 9416 4292 or visit the **Foster Care Association of Victoria** website at <a href="https://www.fcav.org.au/">https://www.fcav.org.au/</a>. Alternatively, you can speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

#### **Carer Advisory Groups**

Carers are at the centre of change for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. In order to improve quality outcomes, and to allow for better stability in care arrangements, it is critical that carers participate in decisionmaking and development opportunities.

Carer Advisory Groups is a new initiative that brings together foster and kinship carers, agency management, peak bodies, child protection and other department representatives to improve communication

and to promote service improvements in outof-home care. The groups meet quarterly and membership is for a period of 18 months. There are Carer Advisory Groups in the North, East, South and West divisions of the department.

For more information on Carer Advisory Groups or if you are interested in joining a group in your area, call the **Foster Care Association of Victoria** who provide a supporting role on (03) 9416 4292 or visit <a href="https://www.fcav.org.au/">https://www.fcav.org.au/</a>>.

- ▶ Kinship Carers Victoria call (03) 9372 2422 or visit <a href="http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/">http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/</a>
- VACCA call (03) 9287 8800 or visit <a href="https://www.vacca.org/">https://www.vacca.org/</a>
- ▶ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) <a href="http://www.snaicc.org.au/">http://www.snaicc.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Permanent Care and Adoptive Families call (03) 9020 1833 or visit <www.pcafamilies.org.au/>
- Mirabel Foundation call (03) 9527 9422 or visit <a href="https://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au/">https://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au/</a>



# 8. Contact with family members

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### 8. Contact with family members

#### The importance of contact

A child or young person's parents and wider family are a significant part of their life and identity. Not being able to live with or near their parents or community can raise complex emotions for them. Having contact with their parents and other family members can help with their development, to make sense of their history and experiences, and feel a sense of belonging. Contact is also a way for parents to maintain connection with their child or young person.

As a kinship carer who is a member of the child or young person's family, social or community network, this may be difficult and raise complex emotions for you, particularly if you feel a sense of divided loyalty where there is conflict in the family.

Wherever possible and when safe to do so, children and young people will return to live with their parents. The aim is to support the parents to have them return to their care as soon as is safely possible, and most will return home to their parents, usually within six months. You play a key role during and after this reunification.

A significant number of children and young people return to their parents or other family as young adults, if they were not able to as children, so how you talk and express your views about the child or young person's parents and other family is critical.

A child or young person in care has a complex life story, which can be difficult to describe in the school playground. The more we help them understand it and feel like they can share their story in a way they are comfortable with, the stronger sense of self they can have.

Contact can be between a child or young person, and a parent, sibling, extended family or other people significant to them. Talk to them about who they would like to stay in contact with, or to reconnect with. If they identify someone, check with their child protection worker or agency case manager before making any arrangements to contact that person.

Most parents want to see their child or young person and want face-to-face contact.

However, other contact may include letters and cards, phone calls, video calls or other types of communication, and may include overnight visits and trips.

The Act ensures that parents are provided with information about the child or young person while they are in out-of-home care, regardless of whether the plan is for them to return to the parent's care or not.

Family is central to Aboriginal people and includes parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, Elders and community members. Family is a source of support, strength, cultural heritage and identity.

#### **Contact arrangements**

Contact, sometimes called access, is any contact a child or young person in care has with parents, other family or friends (other than their carer) while they are in care. If not living together, contact with siblings is vital for all children and young people in strengthening cultural identify, and positive social and emotional wellbeing.

It is not your role or responsibility to decide if a person can have contact. Any person wanting contact will need to speak with child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency first. The person will need to undergo an assessment and safety checks by child protection.

The decisions about a child or young person's contact arrangements are made by the Children's Court or by the case planner, depending on the type of protection order in place. These contact arrangement decisions are referred to in the case plan. A separate schedule or contact plan may be developed as part of the court process or authorised by the case planner, and is given to everyone involved, including you, by the child protection worker or agency case manager.

Where child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency makes decisions around contact arrangements, they will take into account the child or young person's age, developmental stage, school, home environment and other requirements, and their views and wishes, as far as these can be gained. Where possible, the arrangements should also consider your own family's commitments.

The care team makes decisions about providing transport and support for the child or young person before, during and after contact, promoting a positive experience and environment, and making arrangements for them to be supervised as required.

To support positive supervised contact arrangements, it is preferable for an adult that the child or young person knows to facilitate the contact. This could be you, as the child or young person's carer, or another family member who has been assessed by child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency to undertake supervised contact. When such options are not suitable, the child protection worker or the agency case manager will arrange for supervised contact to occur.

#### **Approved contacts**

Only people who have been approved by child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency may attend contact visits with a child or young person. When people not approved for contact attend a scheduled contact session, the unapproved person should be asked to leave, and if they do not, the contact will need to be terminated. This should be done as soon as possible, while protecting the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.

If you are supporting a contact and this occurs, let the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager know as soon as possible, so they can clarify whether that person can be approved for contact in future.

#### **Supervised contact**

The child or young person's safety, needs and rights must always come first. Sometimes, contact is supervised to ensure they are safe. Supervision provides support so that contact can happen in a calm and positive way. Everyone should be treated with respect, even when agreement is not possible.

Contact arrangements for each child or young person will be affected by their family situation, the Children's Court order and the case plan.

Contact can be stressful for children and young people, parents and kinship carers. Stress and anxiety can unsettle the child or young person, and negatively affect their behaviour, prior to and after contact. To reduce anxiety and stress, and keep everyone safe, it is important that contact is well planned and managed, and that everyone sticks to the plan, so there are no surprises.

You should discuss any concerns about contact arrangements with the child or young person's case manager.

#### How you can support contact

By supporting the child or young person's contact with their parents and other family members, you can help the parents and other family members feel proud of them. You can celebrate accomplishments together and let the parents know about the positive things the child or young person has achieved.

If you are caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, you can help support their connection to family and culture through return to Country. This includes helping them to find out:

- who they are
- who they belong to
- where they belong
- where they come from
- what they do
- what they believe
- what symbolises their Aboriginal culture.

There are times when you may be frustrated in managing a child or young person's contact with their parents and other family. There might be cancellations by the parents, other family members, or the child or young person's case manager, and periods when the parents simply do not attend as planned.

These are times when the child or young person is reminded that they may not return to their parents, and they may experience intense emotions about this. Helping them work through their emotions is an important part of caring for them. Support them to understand that it is normal to miss their parents or be angry or sad at things that happen, while encouraging them to see the positives in remaining connected to their parents and other family members.

You are the one standing beside the child or young person as they go through the many different and confusing emotions when things go well or not so well. It is important to remain neutral or positive about their parents and other family members, while providing this support. If they hear or sense negativity

about their parents or other family from those around them, it adds to their confusion. This can be a delicate balance for you, but it will promote more positive outcomes for the child or young person.

#### What to do if contact is difficult

Contact arrangements involve many parties, including the child or young person's parents, siblings and other family members. You may have limited influence over who the child has contact with and under what circumstance this occurs. You may also be dealing with your own feelings about the child or young person's parent/s or having to navigate a complex relationship with a family member. Other family members may also have strong views about the contact arrangements.

You should be told of cancellations or changes to contact arrangements as soon as possible by the child protection worker or agency case manager. If contact arrangements are causing difficulty, you should speak to child protection or your agency. A care team meeting about contact arrangements may help strengthen the arrangements and reduce stress.

There are also instances when a child or young person's behaviours will regress before or after contact. This could result in the child bedwetting, having nightmares or acting out. Talk to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about this. Strategies to address this regression can be supported through the care team.

#### **Undisclosed care arrangements**

Section 265 of the Act states that a child or young person's parents are entitled to be given details of their whereabouts under an interim accommodation order, unless the Court or a bail justice making the interim accommodation order directs otherwise.

The Court or bail justice may only direct that the child or young person's whereabouts be withheld from the parents if it is determined that this is in the best interests of the child or young person, for example, in order to protect the child or young person from harm, including from exposure to potential conflict between the parent and carer, or from a risk of abduction.

Where a child or young person in your care is subject to a family reunification order, care by Secretary order, or long-term care order, it is a case planning decision whether to disclose placement details to the child or young person's parent. As with interim accommodation orders, the decision should be based on an assessment of the child or young person's best interests and their rights under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act* (2006).

The case planning decision should be reviewed whenever there is a significant change of circumstances, and can be reviewed on request by you, the child or young person's parent, or, if old enough, the child or young person. As the child or young person's primary carer, your views should be considered by the case planner before they make a decision.

- ► Contact advice see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/contact">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/contact</a>
- ▶ Contact for kinship carers see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/</a> advice-and-protocols/information-sheets/contact/contact-kinship-carers>
- Information sheet 5: Case planning, case management, roles and responsibilities.
- Return to Country Framework on the VACCA website <a href="https://www.vacca.org/about-us/return-country-framework/">https://www.vacca.org/about-us/return-country-framework/</a>





# 9. Aboriginal kinship care

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### 9. Aboriginal kinship care

Caring for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) family member can be an enriching and enjoyable experience for your family. As First Peoples of Australia, Aboriginal culture is rich with traditions, ceremony, art, stories, music and dance.

Raising strong and healthy Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care can only be achieved with the active support of carers who acknowledge the importance of culture to their wellbeing.

All Aboriginal children and young people have the right to:

- identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, without fear that they will be ridiculed or seen as less than others
- an education that strengthens their culture and identity
- maintain their connection to their land, waters and Country
- maintain strong kinship ties and social obligations
- be taught cultural heritage from respected members of the community, including Elders
- receive information in a culturally sensitive, relevant and accessible manner.

If you are informed or believe that the child or young person may be Aboriginal, you should advise their child protection worker or agency case manager as soon as possible, or their manager. Child protection will consult with the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service to ensure the Aboriginal child placement principle is followed, the child or young person's right to culture is upheld and cultural planning occurs.

If you are a non-Aboriginal carer looking after an Aboriginal family member, you may need to develop your cultural awareness so you can raise them in a culturally safe and supportive home environment.

You will be required to undertake mandatory cultural training. Cultural competency is fundamental in promoting and strengthening resilience, and healing through connection to culture. This will help Aboriginal children and young people develop in a positive manner, so they can meet appropriate developmental milestones and develop a positive self-image.

You may be aware that there are additional roles and responsibilities in caring for Aboriginal children and young people, which can include:

- fostering their Aboriginal identity by ensuring that you prioritise and support activities and relationships that keep them connected to culture and community
- contributing to the development and review of their cultural plan

- understanding the significance of the cultural plan and your responsibilities in implementing the plan
- referring to their parents and family in a manner that is accepting and respectful of their ongoing role in their life, cultural identity and spiritual beliefs
- understanding their family's rights in decision making, through supporting the actions agreed to in Aboriginal family-led decision-making meetings
- being aware of significant cultural events throughout the year, and what activities are occurring in the Aboriginal community for them to participate in.

#### **Aboriginal culture**

Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us. For Aboriginal people, land, the kinship system and spirituality are the foundations on which culture is built.

For an Aboriginal child or young person to grow into a strong adult, they must be supported to learn about, maintain and grow in their knowledge and connections to land, family, community and culture. If these elements are not present in their life, it will significantly affect their social, emotional, health, educational and psychological development and wellbeing, throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Aboriginal children and young people not supported to maintain cultural connections experience poorer life outcomes than those who grow up strong in culture and identity. Past government policies that include forcible removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, the forcible removal of children from their families, and penalties imposed on Aboriginal people practising culture, have denied many Aboriginal people their culture and had significant impacts on life outcomes.

Aboriginal children and young people in care are reliant on their carers and workers to understand the importance of culture and to commit to ensuring their connection to culture is a priority.

#### **Torres Strait Islander culture**

Torres Strait Islanders are not mainland Aboriginal people who inhabit the islands of Torres Strait. Torres Strait Islander culture has a unique identity and geographical territory, although the culture and people are often homogenised with Aboriginal people.

While Torres Strait Islander people have their own distinctive culture and languages, they share many disadvantages with Aboriginal people, such as reduced life expectancy and economic hardship due to the negative impacts of colonisation. See *useful resources* for more information.

# Promotion of cultural and spiritual identity

As a carer of an Aboriginal child or young person, it is critical for you to show them you value their culture and recognise that this is an important part of who they are. This will give them positive thoughts about cultural and spiritual identity, and will foster:

- the development of a positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity
- resilience
- confidence in themselves
- interest in knowing what Aboriginal nation they belong to and visiting their traditional Country, as part of the cultural plan
- encouraging and maintaining positive contact with their extended family.

Aboriginal spirituality is characterised as '...the core of Aboriginal being, their very identity. It gives meaning to all aspects of life, including relationships with one another and the environment. All objects are living and share the same soul and spirit as Aboriginals. There is a kinship with the environment. Aboriginal spirituality can be expressed visually, musically and ceremonially'.<sup>1</sup>

Aboriginal children and young people who are strong in their culture and spirituality, and see that their culture is valued by others, are more likely to develop a positive self-image. Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to continue to develop their cultural and spiritual identity, and maintain ties to culture and community, while they are in care.

#### Connection to community and culture

Many important aspects of Aboriginal culture are shared from generation to generation, through storytelling, songs and dance. For these reasons, it is important for Aboriginal children and young people to remain connected to other Aboriginal people and Elders in the community, so they do not miss these important teachings.

Through connection to community and culture, children and young people learn who they are, where they fit within their kinship system and community, their history and cultural practices.

Ways you can help to keep Aboriginal children and young people connected with their culture while they are in your care, include:

- recognising and fostering the importance of culture and maintaining their connection to culture
- celebrating and promoting Aboriginal cultures in your home (this can be done by taking an interest in traditional and contemporary culture and people, by identifying and discussing past and present Aboriginal role models, taking an interest in Aboriginal art and displaying this in your home, listening to Aboriginal music (3KND radio station – 1503AM), and watching films made by Aboriginal people and Aboriginal television, such as NITV)

<sup>1.</sup> Grant, EK 2004, Unseen, Unheard, Unspoken: Exploring the Relationship Between Aboriginal Spirituality & Community Development, Thesis, University of South Australia.

- supporting them to have contact with Aboriginal people, services and events, such as using Aboriginal health services, attending Aboriginal playgroups, early years services, homework clubs or youth groups
- attending Aboriginal celebrations and community events with them, such as NAIDOC events, National Aboriginal Children's Day and sporting carnivals
- supporting them to visit their land or Country, develop relationships with Aboriginal community members and Elders, identify and organise an Aboriginal mentor, and learn about their Aboriginal culture and history
- increasing your awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, in order to be more supportive
- providing them with lots of support and positive reinforcement, to enhance their view of themselves, their culture and identity
- being accepting of their family, background, lifestyle and culture, and encouraging them to discuss their family in a positive, yet realistic way
- helping them to discuss and appreciate differences, and teaching them resilience, including strategies to deal with people who are not accepting of differences
- encouraging them to keep an 'Aboriginal life book' or special journal to store information or photos about themselves and their family. This can include a story about their dreamtime, or spending time with family, photos of family, and participation in cultural events.

#### **Cultural safety**

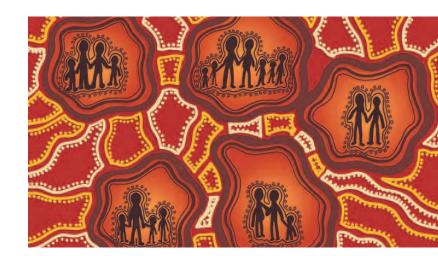
Children and young people's everyday experience should be of feeling culturally safe, which includes respecting Aboriginal culture, values and practices. You may need to explore ways to make sure that your home provides this environment and that you work with the school to promote cultural safety.

Some of the things you can do to make your home culturally safe and to reinforce positive experiences and thoughts for the child or young person in your care include:

- taking an interest in their culture and who their mob is – learn about their Aboriginal history and talk to them about this
- supporting them if they experience racism or are exposed to negative comments about their Aboriginality.

Cultural safety requires cultural competency

– the ability to understand, communicate with
and interact with people across cultures.



- ▶ Caring for an Aboriginal child in out-of-home care resource developed by VACCA <a href="https://www.vacca.org/product/caring-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-in-out-of-home-care/">https://www.vacca.org/product/caring-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-in-out-of-home-care/</a>
- ▶ Cultural training for carers through your agency or local ACCO.
- Growing up our way: Child rearing practices matrix available through Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) <a href="http://www.snaicc.org.au/growing-up-our-way-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child-rearing-practices-matrix-2011-snaicc/">http://www.snaicc.org.au/growing-up-our-way-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child-rearing-practices-matrix-2011-snaicc/</a>
- ▶ Indigenous Closing the Gap web resource <a href="http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap">http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap</a>
- ▶ Information sheet 7: Caring for Aboriginal children and young people.
- ► Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care: <a href="https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-children-aboriginal-care-program">https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-children-aboriginal-care-program</a>
- Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the basis of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing on the **Lowitija Institute** website <a href="https://www.lowitja.org.au/">https://www.lowitja.org.au/</a>
- Indigenous spirituality
  <a href="http://www.australianstogether.org.au/stories/detail/indigenous-spirituality">http://www.australianstogether.org.au/stories/detail/indigenous-spirituality></a>
- ▶ Strong spirit strong mind model: informing policy and practice on the **Telethon Kids Institute** website <a href="https://www.telethonkids.org.au/">https://www.telethonkids.org.au/</a>>
- Torres Strait Islanders at Making multicultural Australia <a href="http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/">http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/</a>
- ▶ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies <a href="https://aiatsis.gov.au/">https://aiatsis.gov.au/</a>
- Cultural safety for Aboriginal children on the Commission for Children and Young People website <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ What is cultural safety? SNAICC website <a href="http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/">http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/</a>



# 10. Caring for children and young people with diverse needs

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# 10. Caring for children and young people with diverse needs

Diversity can refer to a person's cultural background, their language, disability, sexuality or gender identity.

Caring for children and young people with diverse needs can be enriching and bring new experiences to you, as well as to them. It is important that their differences are responded to in a respectful and sensitive way.

Diversity can impact on a child or young person's sense of identity and worth, development and experience of the world around them.

# Caring for children and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds

Culture, language and religion go to the heart of a child or young person's identity and how they connect to others. It shapes their sense of self and belonging, and impacts their health and wellbeing.

It is important that the child or young person in your care feels supported to express and understand their culture, language and religion. Children may have preferences connected to their religion or culture. You may need to seek guidance or advice to understand how to support these practices.

Everyone has culture. However, while we are born into cultures, we are not born with culture. Culture is something that we learn. It is dynamic and adapts to changing circumstances.

Some aspects of culture include our:

- identity
- ethnicity
- age or generation
- gender
- sexual orientation
- education
- occupation and socioeconomic status
- ability and disability.

# Supporting cultural understanding and expression

In determining what decision to make or action to take in the best interests of the child or young person, the Act requires consideration to be given to the child or young person's social, individual and cultural identity and religious faith, and their age, maturity, sex and sexual identity.

There are many ways you can support a child or young person to express and understand their culture, including by:

- thinking about your own culture, aspects that are important to you and how it shapes your identity
- thinking about attitudes or beliefs you may have about culture
- improving your understanding of their culture on both sides of their family tree through research, or by contacting multicultural services (through your council).
   Gather relevant information and make it available to them
- celebrating cultural and religious occasions with them
- encouraging them to talk about their culture, extended family, religion and traditions, and what is important to them
- identifying other significant people in their life who can help them to maintain contact with their culture, language or religion
- if the child or young person is Aboriginal, making arrangements to speak with Elders who are part of their community

- encouraging opportunities for them to speak and read their own language by accessing community groups, books, videos, toys, music or other resources that are related to their culture, language or religion (start with your local library)
- encouraging them to participate in activities that involve people from diverse backgrounds and teaching them about diversity
- recognising that they might be subject to bullying or discrimination due to their culture and language
- supporting them with different dietary and food preparation practices, such as halal or kosher
- being aware that a young person may choose to become involved in religious and spiritual practices as they develop their own identity, and to approach this with curiosity and an openness to learn about their area of interest, and why they are exploring a particular path.

- **Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria** the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria <a href="http://www.eccv.org.au/">http://www.eccv.org.au/</a>
- **FKA Children's Services** supports schools and childcare services to support the culture of children <a href="http://fka.org.au/">http://fka.org.au/</a>
- Interpreter services speak with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager for access to funded interpreters
- Multicultural services your local council should have a directory or list of community and multicultural services. Check their website

# Children and young people with a disability

Children and young people with a disability have ambitions, skills and talents like other children and young people. They have the same rights as everyone in our society to participation, opportunities, development and self-determination in everyday life.

A disability is a physical, sensory, intellectual, cognitive or psychiatric impairment that affects the child or young person's ability to undertake everyday activities. A disability can occur at any time in life. Children and young people can be born with a disability or acquire a disability suddenly through an accident, a condition, or from abuse or neglect. Some forms of disability are intermittent, while others are temporary or permanent. Some disabilities may be obvious, while others are hidden.

People with a disability are more likely to leave school earlier, earn less, have a higher level of unemployment, and are more likely to live in funded accommodation options. They are also more vulnerable to abuse and have higher levels of social isolation.

Ensuring that the disability-related support needs of the child or young person in your care are met is part of meeting their best interests and is a key role of the care team. As the day-to-day carer of the child or young person, you will develop important insights, skills and knowledge about their strengths and needs, including their disability-related needs.

#### **Disability support**

If a child or young person you are caring for has a known disability, their child protection worker or agency case manager will inform you about this, and explain the needs and supports for them. They may be receiving supports and services funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or from the department's Disability Services in pre-NDIS areas.

If you are concerned that a child or young person in your care may have a disability and it is unclear if they have been assessed, discuss this with their child protection worker or agency case manager, who can contact the department or the NDIS to discuss an assessment and potential eligibility for support.

You can provide support for the child or young person with a disability in your care by:

- seeing the child or young person and their individual personality first, and their disability second
- supporting and advocating for their engagement in education
- understanding the range of services that are available for them, and helping them to access those supports
- ensuring they have access to the aids, equipment and services they require to achieve their goals and aspirations
- maximising opportunities for them to socialise and participate in community activities

- learning what you can about their particular disability and ways to support them with their communication, and physical, social and emotional development
- being aware of their additional vulnerability to abuse, and providing appropriate care and protection.

#### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a national approach to providing individualised support and services for people with a disability. The NDIS is rolling out progressively over three years in Victoria from July 2016 to 30 June 2019. See the **NDIS** website for details about the roll-out schedule at <a href="https://www.ndis.gov.au/index.html">https://www.ndis.gov.au/index.html</a>.

The NDIS is a life-long insurance scheme that uses individualised plans to link people to the supports they need. It provides funding for reasonable and necessary disability-related support needs for eligible people. The NDIS refers to people with a disability in the scheme as participants.

As a kinship carer, you may be required to help the child or young person in your care determine the kinds of supports and services they will require.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is an independent Commonwealth statutory agency. The role of the NDIA is to implement the NDIS. The NDIA will provide people with a disability (including psychosocial disability

associated with a mental illness), who meet access requirements, with the support and services they need to participate in and contribute to the community.

Supports are funded in a range of areas, including:

- education
- employment
- social participation
- independence
- living arrangements
- health and wellbeing.

#### Significant changes at a glance

Each person who meets the access requirements for the NDIS receives a plan of supports that are tailored to their individual needs and aim to help them achieve their goals. It is anticipated that, over time, the NDIS will contribute to greater service access, participation and self-determination by children and adults with disabilities.

People who have received disability support through the Victorian Government move to the NDIS at different times, depending on where they live and the type of support they receive.

#### NDIS eligibility criteria:

The definition of disability under the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* is broader than the current *Victorian Disability Act 2006* definition.

Two important additions to the definition include:

- children under six with a developmental delay who will now be supported by the NDIS, rather than Early Childhood Intervention Services
- people with a psychiatric disability.

To access the NDIS, an individual must:

- have a permanent disability that substantially impacts a person's functional ability to take part in everyday activities or meet the early intervention requirements; and
- be aged less than 65 when they first access the scheme; and
- live in Australia and be an Australian citizen, or hold a permanent visa or a Protected Special Category Visa.

#### New referral pathways

For eligible people living in areas that have transitioned to NDIS, access to disability supports is through the NDIA. The Local Area Coordination partners may assist with conducting the initial eligibility assessments of requests for NDIS participation.

NDIS eligibility assessments and planning requires specific information. Discuss this with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, who can provide support and advocacy through the process.

More information about the National Disability Insurance Scheme and how it works can be found at the **NDIS** website <a href="https://www.ndis.gov.au/index.html">https://www.ndis.gov.au/index.html</a> or call 1800 800 110.

# Disability support – before the National Disability Insurance Scheme starts in your area

Existing Commonwealth and state-based services and supports will continue to be provided until eligible people start their NDIS plans.

The department provides disability supports for children with a disability over six years of age, who are yet to transition to the NDIS, and their carers. This can include individual support packages, facility and community-based respite, behaviour intervention services, therapy and case management.

Access to ongoing disability support is through an application process and registration on the Disability Support Register. Applications for ongoing support can be completed by the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

- Action on Disability Advocacy Service is an organisation that aims to empower people with disabilities from ethnic backgrounds, their families and carers to access services <a href="http://www.adec.org.au/">http://www.adec.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Association for Children with a Disability is an advocacy and information service for families of children with disability <a href="http://acd.org.au/">http://acd.org.au/</a>>
- ▶ **Disability Discrimination Legal Service** is a statewide independent community legal centre that provides free legal services in several areas <a href="http://ddlsaustralia.org/">http://ddlsaustralia.org/</a>>
- ▶ Department of Health and Human Services disability support information <a href="https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/disability">https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/disability</a>
- Information about the **Disability Support Pension** on the Australian Government Department of Human Services website <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/disability-support-pension">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/disability-support-pension</a>
- Exploring the Possibilities provides a range of post-school options available for young people with a disability at the **Disability Advocacy Resource Unit** (DARU) <a href="http://www.daru.org.au/resource/exploring-the-possibilities-post-school-options-for-young-people-with-a-disability">http://www.daru.org.au/resource/exploring-the-possibilities-post-school-options-for-young-people-with-a-disability>
- Information sheet 8. Education supports
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) <a href="http://www.vic.gov.au/ndis.html">http://www.vic.gov.au/ndis.html</a>
- ▶ Raising Children Network includes links to a forum for parents of children with a disability and information about supporting siblings, or other children in the family <a href="http://raisingchildren.net.au/">http://raisingchildren.net.au/</a>
- ▶ Youth Disability Advocacy Service a Victoria-wide disability advocacy service for young people aged 12 to 25 <a href="http://www.ydas.org.au/">http://www.ydas.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Victorian Disability Services Commissioner provides free, confidential and supportive complaints resolution for people with a disability <a href="http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au/">http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ First Peoples Disability Network Australia <a href="http://fpdn.org.au/">http://fpdn.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Mission Australia support for parents and carers <a href="https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/family-children-services/support-for-parents-carers">https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/family-children-services/support-for-parents-carers</a>
- ► Australian Government support for families, carers and children <a href="https://www.mychild.gov.au/families-carers/support">https://www.mychild.gov.au/families-carers/support</a>
- Pregnancy, birth and baby information on disability and parenting support <a href="http://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/disability-and-parenting-support">http://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/disability-and-parenting-support</a>
- Intellectual Disability Rights Service <a href="http://idrs.org.au/makingsense/workers/">http://idrs.org.au/makingsense/workers/</a>
- ▶ Scope <a href="http://www.scopeaust.org.au/age-group/early-years/">http://www.scopeaust.org.au/age-group/early-years/</a>

#### **Australia-wide organisations**

- Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) represents children and young people with disability, and their families. The organisation provides information for families, raises public awareness and seeks to improve available services. Call (03) 9417 1025 or 1800 222 660, or visit <a href="http://www.cyda.org.au/">http://www.cyda.org.au/</a>
- **Early Childhood Intervention Australia** promotes early invention for infants and young children with developmental delays or disabilities. It runs workshops, seminars and conferences, and has a chapter in each state and territory. Visit <a href="https://www.ecia.org.au/">https://www.ecia.org.au/</a>
- Livewire is an online community designed for young people living with a serious illness, chronic health condition or disability, and their families. Visit <a href="https://www.livewire.org.au/">https://www.livewire.org.au/</a>
- ▶ **MyTime** groups are for parents, carers or grandparents of children with a disability or chronic medical condition. The groups meet to socialise, discuss and learn more about the services and supports in their area, and are facilitated by professionals with disability and parenting expertise. Visit <a href="https://www.mytime.net.au/">https://www.mytime.net.au/</a>
- ▶ **Nican** aims to improve access to recreation experiences for people with disabilities. The website has information on recreation, tourism, sport and the arts, including a directory of wheelchair-accessible tourist accommodation. Visit <a href="http://www.nican.com.au/">http://www.nican.com.au/</a>>
- Ramp Up is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's website featuring news, discussion, debate and humour for everyone in Australia's disability communities.
  Visit <a href="http://www.abc.net.au/rampup/">http://www.abc.net.au/rampup/</a>
- Siblings Australia provides support for brothers and sisters of people with special needs. Visit <a href="http://siblingsaustralia.org.au/">http://siblingsaustralia.org.au/</a>

# Same-sex attracted, gender diverse or intersex children and young people

#### **Terminology**

In relation to children and young people, the term 'same-sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex' (SSAGDI) is often used, as it is recognised that they may be exploring their sexuality, and that a child or young person's expression of identity may not be linear. For this reason, SSAGDI is used in this section.

To define some of the terms used:

- LGBTIQ+ is used to refer collectively to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual refers to sexual orientation.
- Transgender relates to gender identity (being male, female or other).
- Brotherboys and Sistergirls (or Sistagirls) are trans people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and have a strong sense of their cultural identity.
- Intersex refers to congenital (from birth) variations in physical, hormonal or chromosomal sex characteristics. Please be aware that some people do not use the term intersex, referring instead to the name of the medical condition relating to their sex characteristic variation.

If you would like more information about the meaning of any of these terms, the **National LGBTI Health Alliance** provides useful definitions that can be found at <a href="http://lgbtihealth.org.au/communities/">http://lgbtihealth.org.au/communities/</a>>.

A child or young person's sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status is very personal to them, and you may or may not be informed about this. Some may never talk about it, no matter how supportive their environment. It is important not to make assumptions, but where it is known that a child or young person is SSAGDI, this needs to be respected. It can be challenging for a child or young person to reveal their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status in new environments.

Children or young people who are SSAGDI are subject to higher levels of abuse and discrimination than the population as a whole, which puts them at greater risk of poorer physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Some intersex variations can also be associated with physical, emotional or learning difficulties.

A SSAGDI child or young person in your care may have experienced discrimination in the past from friends, family and services. This can also be an issue for them at school. They may anticipate discrimination when meeting new people or starting with new services, and may need additional support for this reason.

Children or young people who are SSAGDI in rural areas can also be isolated, with fewer social and support networks than in metropolitan areas. Confidentiality is

particularly important for people who are SSAGDI and living in small communities, as they may be at a higher risk of experiencing homophobia, biphobia, interphobia or transphobia, if their confidentiality is breached.

Supportive schools can be crucial for the health and wellbeing of children and young people who are SSAGDI. Many schools have specific initiatives to support SSAGDI students. For instance, 'queer-straight alliances' and 'diversity groups' have been formed in schools by those who are SSAGDI or by those who support them. Despite this, children and young people who are SSAGDI can face verbal and physical homophobic, interphobic and transphobic abuse and bullying at school, and difficulties with establishing relationships.

# Supporting a SSAGDI child or young person

You can provide support for a SSAGDI child or young person in your care by:

- not making assumptions about their gender or sexuality
- responding positively when they discuss or acknowledge their sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status
- respecting their right to privacy about their SSAGDI orientation, if that is their preference, and ensuring confidentiality of any information shared

- identifying and linking in with SSAGDI support groups, information networks, directories and SSAGDI-inclusive healthcare professionals and agencies, so they can be referred to appropriate services, including online services, as needed
- reading available information to be better informed
- ensuring they have access to information about sexual health and safety
- understanding that they are at greater risk of suffering from anxiety or poor mental health, and accessing services and supports for them if needed
- being aware of and responding to any particular physical, mental or learning needs relating to their intersex variation
- identifying specialist services for referral if appropriate – your agency or doctor may be able to provide additional advice.

There is also a range of support groups for caring for SSAGDI children and young people that provide information and advice that may be helpful to you. See the *useful resources* section for further information.

#### Discrimination and bullying

Discrimination is treating someone unfairly or unjustly because of their gender, race, culture, background, disability, sexuality, identity or other reason. See *Chapter 11. Education, training and employment* for more information about discrimination and bullying, and how to tackle it.

- LGBTQ young people in care at CREATE <a href="https://create.org.au/">https://create.org.au/</a> or call the Victoria office on (03) 9918 0002
- Depression, anxiety and LGBTI young people call beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or visit beyondblue <a href="https://www.beyondblue.org.au/">https://www.beyondblue.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Rainbow Families Council for links to LGBTI support services <a href="http://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/">http://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/</a>
- Rainbow Network a networking and information-sharing site <a href="http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au/">http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au/</a>
- Resources for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex carers Call **Carer Gateway** on 1800 422 737 or visit Carer Gateway <a href="http://www.carergateway.gov.au/">http://www.carergateway.gov.au/</a>
- Resources for young SSAGDI people Open Doors Youth Service <a href="http://www.opendoors.net.au/">http://www.opendoors.net.au/</a> or telephone (07) 3257 7660
- Department of Education and Training Safe Schools initiative, a commitment that schools make to create a safe and inclusive environment, including for LGBTI students. Telephone (03) 9637 3690 or visit the Department of Education and Training website <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx?Redirect=1">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx?Redirect=1</a>
- ► SSAGDI youth with a drug or alcohol problem **YSAS Queer Youth Withdrawal Program** <a href="http://www.ysas.org.au/QBLTQI">http://www.ysas.org.au/QBLTQI</a>, or telephone (03) 9415 8881
- ▶ Minus 18 <a href="https://minus18.org.au/">https://minus18.org.au/</a> is a youth-led organisation for SSAGDI youth



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### 11. Education, training and employment

#### The importance of education

The Education State is the Victorian Government's plan to deliver on its promise of providing excellence and equity in education, from childhood, through school and further education.

Education and employment can make a vital contribution to improving the outcomes and lives of children and young people in out-of-home care, who are more likely to experience disruption in their education. Completing education increases opportunities in post-school education and employment.

Early childhood education and care services, school, post-school education and work can provide places of safety and stability, where children and young people can connect and build relationships with staff, friends and potential mentors. In some cases, as with other children and young people, they can face challenges in education and at work, and may need assistance and support.

The circumstances and background of the child or young person in your care may mean that they are likely to need extra assistance to make the most of educational opportunities,

experience positive school engagement and improve academic performance. You play an important role in creating a home environment that supports them and their development, and helps them gain the most they can from education and support services.

If you are caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, there is a range of education services that support engagement and participation within culturally safe environments, to strengthen connection to culture and community. See the *useful resources* section in this chapter.

## Marrung: Aboriginal education plan 2016-2026

Marrung is a strategy to ensure that all Koorie Victorians achieve their learning aspirations, and realise the full benefits of the Education State reforms across early childhood, schools and further education. It requires all services to embed Koorie aspirations and outcomes as core business, including early childhood services, schools and training providers.

For more information, email <marrung@edumail.vic.gov.au> or visit **Marrung** <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/marrung">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/marrung</a>>.

# Early childhood education and care

There is strong evidence that participation in high-quality, early childhood education and care services makes a significant and enduring difference to children's social emotional and cognitive development. These services can be particularly important for children experiencing disadvantage. There is a range of universal and specialist services that promote early childhood education and care, and understand that a child's health and wellbeing are crucial enablers of learning and development outcomes.

#### **Early Childhood Agreement**

The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care aims to increase the participation of young children in out-of-home care in high-quality, early childhood services, with a focus on maternal and child health, and kindergarten services. See *useful resources* for how to access the agreement.

#### Maternal and child health

The role of maternal and child health service is to ensure that young children are on track to reach their developmental milestones. The maternal and child health service offers 10 free key ages-and-stages consultations, where you can talk about your caring experiences, and explore ways to improve the child's health, growth and development.

Under the Early Childhood Agreement, all children in out-of-home care aged 0–12 months are automatically referred to enhanced maternal and child health services, which provide a more intensive level of support, including assertive outreach and short-term case management.

For more information about maternal and child health services, see *Chapter 12. Health*.

#### Types of early childhood services

There is a range of education and childcare services available for the children in your care, which are described in Table 3.

Children are now required by state and federal legislation to be fully vaccinated, in order to attend childcare and kindergarten, and to access childcare subsidies.



Table 3. Education and childhood services available

Long day care	Primarily aimed at 0–6 year olds, long day care is centre-based care, typically operating for at least eight hours a day on normal working days, for a minimum of 48 weeks per year. Long day care is staffed by qualified early childhood educators. Education and care programs are delivered in accordance with a curriculum framework. In Victoria, this is the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and most long day care centres also offer a kindergarten program.
Family day care	Family day care provides home-based education and care for children within a carer's home. It includes all-day care, part-time, casual, overnight and outside school-hours care.
Kindergarten	Kindergarten is an educational program delivered by qualified early childhood teachers, who work to engage each child in effective learning, communication and thinking. Kindergarten programs in Victoria must now adhere to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Kindergarten can be delivered as a sessional program or integrated within a long day care program. The Victorian Government supports access to 15 hours per week of funded kindergarten programs in the two years before school, for three and four-year-old children in out-of-home care. Depending on the service type, applications for either the Early Start Kindergarten Grant for three-year olds, or the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy or Early Start Extension Grant for four-year olds are made by the service on behalf of carers and families. For Aboriginal children, there are subsidies for three and four-year-old kindergarten and Aboriginal early child care centres. See <i>useful resources</i> in this section for more information.
Year before school	Children in out-of-home care in the year before school can access the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy or Early Start Extension Grant for 15 hours free or low-cost kindergarten.
Outside school- hours care	This care is provided for primary school-aged children before and after school, during school holidays and on most pupil-free days. Vacation care is a type of outside school-hours care that includes indoor and outdoor activities. My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia is the national framework for school-age care.

#### Table 3. Education and childhood services available (continued)

Occasional care	Occasional care is provided in a range of settings on an hourly basis, for short periods of time, or at irregular intervals. Services are delivered by qualified staff, who provide developmental activities for children primarily aged 0–6 years.
Supported playgroups	Supported playgroups funded by the Department of Education and Training are run by qualified facilitators and use evidence-based strategies to support parents and carers to develop their skills and confidence, to promote their children's wellbeing and development. Supported Playgroups provide a play-based social environment. Parents and carers are also supported to connect with local services in their area and linked into universal services such as maternal and child health, and kindergarten. There is a number of supported playgroups run by Aboriginal organisations that also provide a connection to culture for children, and an opportunity to meet with other Aboriginal children, families and carers.

- ▶ The Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Early Years Support <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/needs/Pages/aboriginalsupport.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/needs/Pages/aboriginalsupport.aspx</a>
- ► Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care

  <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/outofhomecare.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/outofhomecare.aspx</a>
- ▶ Location and quality rating of local childcare services visit the **Australian Government** website <a href="https://www.mychild.gov.au/">https://www.mychild.gov.au/</a>>
- MyTime this is a national program for carers and parents of children aged 0–16 with a disability, developmental delay or chronic health condition. For more information and to find a supported playgroup in your area, visit MyTime <a href="https://www.mytime.net.au/">https://www.mytime.net.au/</a>
- Supported Playgroups provided for parents and carers of babies and young children to develop parents' and carers' skills and confidence to promote their children's development and wellbeing. For more information and to find a Supported Playgroup in your area, contact your local council.
- ▶ The Department of Education and Training website outlines the types of **kindergarten funding** available, eligibility and how to apply for funding <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderdatacollection.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderdatacollection.aspx</a>>

# Supporting young children's executive functioning

Research demonstrates the importance of the first three years of life in shaping learning and development. From birth, early experiences and relationships influence a child's longterm outcomes and life chances. This includes developing:

- executive functioning and the capacity to experience, regulate and express emotion
- close, secure and satisfying relationships
- the ability to explore, discover and learn about themselves and the world around them.<sup>2</sup>

This is important foundational knowledge for all early childhood professionals to understand and apply in their work with families and children across birth to eight years.

#### Subsidies and supports

Select an early childhood service carefully so that you can access available grants and subsidies, as these are not automatic. Check whether the service offers a funded kindergarten program to ensure that the program delivered is of high quality, and that the service can apply for Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old children, a Kindergarten Extension Grant when the child is three or four years old.

To find a kindergarten service or child care centre near you with a funded program, visit the **Department of Education and Training** website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov">http://www.education.vic.gov</a>. au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/kinderdatacollection.aspx>.

Talk to child protection or your agency about applying to have fees paid that are not covered by the subsidies.

#### **Child Care Benefit**

The Child Care Benefit assists families with the cost of childcare for children enrolled in approved and registered education and care services. To receive any Child Care Benefit, you must meet the income test. This does not include the care allowance received from the department, as this is not a 'payment' for being a carer and is therefore not considered a source of income.

Child Care Benefit approved services include:

- most long day care centres (including those that provide a state-funded kindergarten program)
- family day care
- outside school-hours care programs
- some occasional care and in-home childcare.

There are a number of eligibility requirements to access the Child Care Benefit (see *useful resources* below).

<sup>2.</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) 2015, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf.

A childcare service can tell you if it is an approved provider and if you are accessing registered care. Some providers charge a gap fee that is not covered by the Child Care Benefit. Talk to child protection or your agency if this occurs for you.

#### **Child Care Rebate**

The Child Care Rebate is a Commonwealth payment that helps families with the cost of childcare. It provides extra assistance if the child is attending a Child Care Benefit-approved service, and if you are working, studying or training at some time during the week, or have an exemption. The Child Care Rebate is not income tested.

#### Kindergarten fee subsidies and Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grants

Kindergartens often charge families fees to help meet the cost of running kindergarten programs. Fees are set by individual services and can vary, depending on how many hours your child attends, group size and extra costs, such as excursions. The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy or Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant allows children to access up to 15 hours of kindergarten that is delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher in the year before school, free of charge or at low cost.

# Eligibility for Early Start Kindergarten for three-year-old children

All children aged three by 30 April each year who are in out-of-home care are 'known to child protection' and therefore eligible for

an Early Start Kindergarten Grant, where the kindergarten program is delivered by a qualified teacher. All three-year-old Aboriginal children are similarly eligible for an Early Start Kindergarten Grant. Just ask the kindergarten if there is a 'funded kindergarten program' to see if the service can apply.

## Eligibility for a kindergarten fee subsidy in the year before school

If the child in your care is four years old by 30 April and identifies as an Aboriginal person, or if they have ever had contact with child protection (or been referred by child protection to Child FIRST), they are eligible for the subsidy.

Eligibility also applies if you or the child holds:

- a Health Care Card
- a Pensioner Concession Card
- a Department of Veterans Affairs
- a Gold Card or White Card
- a Refugee or Asylum Seeker Visa (200-204 or 866)
- an ImmiCard.

Children in out-of-home care are eligible for their own Health Care Card and therefore are eligible for a kindergarten fee subsidy. If the child is in long day care (where they cannot apply for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy), or there has been a delay in getting a Health Care Card, the service may be able to apply for an Early Start Kindergarten Extension Grant to ensure that the 15 hours of free or low-cost funded kindergarten each week is available in the year before school.

Your kindergarten service will apply for the Early Start Kindergarten extension grant on your behalf. The payment will be made directly to your child's kindergarten, and will allow your child to attend up to 15 hours a week for free or at low cost.

You may need to contact central enrolment services (if available) at your local council or individual kindergarten services to find a place.

#### **Inclusion supports**

There are programs available to support children in early childhood education and care services, such as the:

- Preschool Field Officer Program
- Inclusion support for Commonwealth-funded care
- Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages
- Early Childhood Intervention Services.

For more information, see *Information sheet 8*. *Education support*.

#### **Supporting Aboriginal children**

Supporting Aboriginal children and their families in the early years of development and learning is key to ensuring successful future outcomes.

In Victoria, Aboriginal children and their families have access to a full range of early childhood services, and targeted services are available to those who need them.

There are programs that support kindergartens with the aim of supporting Aboriginal children to engage in early childhood education, including:

- Aboriginal Best Start a prevention and early intervention project that aims to improve health, development and learning outcomes for all Victorian children from conception through to school
- Koorie Preschool Assistants provide support to Aboriginal children and their families to access and participate in kindergarten
- Koorie Engagement Support Officers

   promote the importance of learning and development, and facilitate access, participation and engagement of Aboriginal children in learning and development services
- Koorie Education Coordinators provide advice and assistance about the range of programs and initiatives available, and can arrange for a Koorie Engagement Support Officer to be assigned to any school where required.

- Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Early Years Support <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/needs/Pages/aboriginalsupport.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/needs/Pages/aboriginalsupport.aspx</a>
- ▶ Australian Government Department of Human Services for information about Childcare Benefit eligibility criteria <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/payments-families">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/payments-families</a>
- ▶ **Australian Government** Future changes to the Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Rebate. Visit <a href="https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood-and-child-care">https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood-and-child-care</a> for more information
- ▶ Department of Health and Human Services **Financial support guide for home-based carers** <a href="http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria">http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria</a>

#### **Schooling**

It is compulsory in Victoria for children and young people aged six to 17 years to attend school. The Out-of-home Care Partnering Agreement is a joint commitment by the department and the Department of Education and Training to ensure that schools, carers, child protection and agencies work together to support children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve positive educational outcomes.

A child or young person in your care may change schools more frequently due to their changing circumstances. However, efforts will be made to keep the child or young person in their school, if this is possible.

If you are caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, you can obtain education information and assistance by contacting the Koorie Education Coordinator in your area with any queries. See the **Department of Education** 

and Training website for contact details
at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/wannikregional.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/wannikregional.aspx</a>.

#### **Education transition**

For most children and young people, starting school or changing schools is a big milestone. A successful start to a new school is linked to future positive school outcomes, both academically and socially. However, children and young people in out-of-home care may face additional challenges during their transition to or between schools, due to their life experiences and circumstances.

Children in out-of-home care can experience multiple placements and transitions that disrupt early childhood education and care, or schooling arrangements. A positive transition to school can be supported by regular attendance at an early childhood education and care program prior to schooling, such as kindergarten, long day care or family day care.

Every child attending a funded kindergarten program, who is going to school, will have a Transition Learning and Development Statement written for them. A child's transition statement is written by early childhood educators, but incorporates a section for families or carers and the child to fill out.

When your child is entering preparatory school (prep), case managers should work with you, the family and the early childhood education and care service to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement. These statements help Prep teachers to get to know the children entering their classes before they start, and to plan for each child's learning and development.

If a child in out-of-home care has not attended an early childhood education or care service, the case manager should contact the enrolling school as early as possible, to work with you, the family and the school to develop a transition plan that is tailored to the needs of the child.

When a child or young person enters out-ofhome care, a change of schools is to be avoided if possible, as this is often the only remaining stable or consistent place for them when they are facing significant changes.

If they must change their school, the child protection worker or agency case manager will work with you, the child or young person's parents, and the Department of Education and Training's regional office, Catholic Education Office, or Independent Schools Victoria, to identify the closest and most appropriate

school for them. Once enrolled, the case manager will advise the school principal in writing that the child or young person is living in your care.

## School reports

You need to keep the child or young person's school reports, as they go with them through their life. You also need to give a copy of the school reports to their child protection worker or agency case manager to place in the child or young person's file, in case they want to access it in the future. If possible, reports may also be shared with their parents and other family members – especially if it provides opportunities to discuss the child's learning and development strengths and capabilities, and any gaps in achievement.

#### **Parent-teacher interviews**

Talk to the care team about who should attend the child or young person's parent-teacher interview – if necessary, a second interview may be requested to enable both you and the parent to have involvement in their education.

# Out-of-home care education commitment: a partnering agreement

The department, the Department of Education and Training (DET), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria have entered into the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment (the Partnering Agreement). The purpose of the Partnering Agreement is to enable the

education and care systems to work together to improve the educational experience and outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.

The aims of the Partnering Agreement are to make sure that every student in out-of-home care has:

- an Individual Education Plan
- a Student Support Group
- a learning mentor
- appropriate and structured contact between schools, case workers and carers.
- Key requirements in the Partnering Agreement include that:
- the case manager should advise the school in writing when the child or young person lives in out-of-home care
- schools should record the child or young person's living arrangements
- schools should establish a Student Support
  Group for each child or young person in
  out-of-home care, and case managers must
  participate in this group. Your input as the
  primary carer is also vital
- schools should lead the development and regular review of an Individual Education
   Plan for each child or young person in out-of-home care, including input from the case manager and the carer
- schools and case managers should facilitate referrals for assessments and services, to support the learning and wellbeing of the child or young person.

The Partnering Agreement provides useful information for carers of school-aged children and young people, regarding the roles and responsibilities of the school and case manager to support the educational engagement and achievement of children and young people in care. To access the agreement, visit the **Department of Education and Training** at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcresources.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcresources.aspx</a>.

### **Student Support Group**

Principals must make sure that a Student Support Group is established for all children and young people in out-of-home care, and identify and address any issues that impact on their educational outcomes.

The aims of the Student Support Group are to:

- make sure that those with the most knowledge of, and responsibility for, the child or young person work together to support engagement, attendance and achievement, and to establish shared social and educational goals
- plan reasonable adjustments for the child and young person to access the curriculum
- provide educational planning
- provide cultural and community support to Aboriginal children and young people
- monitor the progress of the child or young person.

#### **Individual Education Plans**

Under the Partnering Agreement, Individual Education Plans for each school-age child or young person in out-of-home care are to be developed to support their educational achievement and engagement. The purpose of this plan is to describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the child or young person, and to establish clear goals to achieve them.

The Individual Education Plan should:

- outline a meaningful education program
- be age and developmentally appropriate
- be flexible and future oriented
- be strengths based to focus on the child or young person's potential to achieve good educational, social and behavioural outcomes
- aim to retain the child or young person at school
- support and promote connection to Aboriginal identity and culture
- clearly articulate individual and shared responsibilities
- provide information on the child or young person's progress
- provide guidance to the Student Support Group
- contain a record of decisions and actions
- be reviewed regularly, according to the needs of the child or young person (at least twice a year).

If a child or young person changes school, the Individual Education Plan must be forwarded by the existing school to the new school in a timely manner.

# Initiatives that support school students in out-of-home care

### **LOOKOUT Education Support Centres**

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres (LOOKOUT Centres) employ education and allied health staff to give children and young people in out-of-home care a better chance of doing well in their education. There are four LOOKOUT Centres across the state, one in each Department of Education and Training region.

The LOOKOUT Centres are designed to boost the capacity of schools, carers, child protection workers and out-of-home care services to improve educational outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care. This includes supporting schools, child protection workers and case workers to meet their obligations under the Partnering Agreement.

LOOKOUT Centres assist children and young people through:

- professional development with staff and carers
- advice to schools to support individual students
- culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal children and young people
- challenging enrolment decisions that are not in a student's best interests
- facilitating opportunities for students to participate fully in school life.

### **Designated Teachers**

As an additional support, Victorian schools have a designated teacher, nominated by their principal and trained by LOOKOUT Centres, to be the advocate for out-of-home care students at their school. Together with LOOKOUT Centres, the designated teacher will monitor each student's Individual Education Plan to ensure they are meeting their learning goals.

If you have a concern about an education-related decision and would like advice from the **LOOKOUT** Centre in your region, you can access more information from the Department of Education and Training website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/lookout.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/lookout.aspx</a>>.

### **Koorie Engagement Support Officers**

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) are Department of Education and Training staff who work with education and family service providers, key stakeholders and the Koorie community to improve outcomes for Koorie children and young people. KESOs work with education providers to deliver advice on culturally inclusive learning environments, and provide guidance to assist with coordination of services to support re-engagement of at-risk Koorie children and young people.

## Navigator pilot program

The Navigator pilot program is an Education State initiative, which aims to support disengaged young people back into education, and to break the link between disadvantage and poor educational outcomes. It is currently being piloted in eight areas of Victoria until the end of 2018.

This pilot program supports young people aged 12–17 years, who are not connected to school at all, or those at risk of disengaging. Young people are eligible for the service if they have attended less than 30 per cent of the previous term and live or attend school in one of the eight Navigator areas, regardless of whether it is a government, Catholic or independent school.

Eight Community Sector Organisations are funded to provide intensive case management supports to disengaged young people, working with their families and schools to identify their barriers to education, referring to specialist supports when required, and helping them to re-engage with education.

Navigator services are provided in:

- Bayside Peninsula, by Mission Australia
- Central Highlands, by Berry Street
- Ovens Murray, by Junction Support Services
- Goulburn, by The Bridge Youth Service
- Western Melbourne, by Anglicare Victoria
- Hume Moreland, by Jesuit Social Services
- Southern Melbourne, by South East Local Learning and Employment Network
- Mallee, by Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network.

For more information or to make a referral to **Navigator**, go to the Department of Education and Training website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/navigator.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/navigator.aspx</a>.

#### **School Focused Youth Service**

The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) is a program delivered by 30 providers around the state to support young people, aged 10–18 years, who are attending school but showing signs of disengaging from education.

Providers are individual or consortia of community sector organisations and local councils who are funded to:

- work with schools from all sectors and partners, using evidence to identify the location and needs of young people at risk of disengaging from school
- coordinate support and/or training to build the capacity of schools to support these young people
- support schools to deliver and/or access evidence-based interventions or develop innovative local projects to prevent young people from disengaging from school.

SFYS is available to government, Catholic and independent schools. For a full list of **SFYS providers**, go to the Department of Education and Training website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/sfys.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/sfys.aspx</a>.

## **Learning Beyond the Bell**

Learning Beyond the Bell supports over 250 out-of-school hours learning support programs. These programs provide highquality tuition and learning support to children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and their families. They also assist families to better support learning at home.

### **Education guide for carers**

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and the Department of Education and Training have developed an Education Guide for Carers. This guide brings together information and resources to help carers support the children and young people in their care to stay connected to and engaged with their education. It includes information relating to key education transition points, acknowledging that this is a critical time for both students and carers.

The guide is designed to serve as a starting point and inform carers about:

- where financial and other support is and how to access it
- how schools should be supporting you
- tips for talking with the young person in your care about education and employment pathways when they leave school.

See the **Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare** website for further information at <a href="https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/for-carers/">https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/for-carers/</a>>.

#### **Useful resources**

- Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Programs
  <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/aboriginal/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/aboriginal/Pages/default.aspx</a>
- Out-of-home care education commitment <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx</a>
- ▶ Department of Education and Training Individual Education Plans <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcedplans.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcedplans.aspx</a>
- Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2022, a strategy to ensure that all Koorie Victorians achieve their learning aspirations and realise the full benefits of the Education State reforms across early childhood, schools and further education. Visit the Department of Education and Training website at
  - <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/aboriginal/Pages/marrung.aspx>
- Department of Education and Training Transitions and Pathways at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/transres.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/transres.aspx</a>.

## Allowances and exemptions

#### Youth Allowance - Centrelink

A young person may qualify for a Youth Allowance if they are between 16 and 21 years, or up to 25 years, if they are a full-time student.

The level of funding depends on various factors and is assessed on a case-by-case basis. The young person in your care may need help from you, or their child protection worker or agency case manager to apply for the Youth Allowance.

### **ABSTUDY - Centrelink**

ABSTUDY helps with the costs for Aboriginal young people who are studying or undertaking an Australian apprenticeship. Contact the Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre on 1800 136 380 for any queries.

## Tuition fee exemptions – Young People Transitioning From Care Initiative

The purpose of the Young People Transitioning from Care Initiative is to reduce barriers and increase access for disadvantaged young people to participate in education and training. Through the initiative, the eligible young person will be supported with 'zero tuition fees' to study in government-subsidised accredited training through the Victorian Training Guarantee (VTG).

A young person is eligible if they:

- are currently on a Child Protection Order or a Youth Justice Order
- have transitioned from a Child Protection Order or a Youth Justice Order, and are under the age of 22 years as at 1 January in the year of first commencing education and training.

#### **Accredited training**

The zero tuition fees will be provided to study in accredited Government subsidised training through the VTG for courses at approved providers, including:

- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)
- the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Certificate I-IV
- diploma or advanced diploma courses
- units of accredited training that allow the young person to be issued with a statement of attainment.

# School-attending care allowance for 18 – 21 year olds

The department may provide a care allowance to you if the young person in your care turns 18 and is enrolled in secondary education. You may continue to receive a care allowance up until the young person reaches 21 years of age, providing they remain in secondary education, undertaking a secondary education qualification including:

- VCE
- VCAL at intermediate level or higher
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications at Certificate II level or higher
- International Baccalaureate diploma program
- VCAL at foundation level or Certificate I in Transition Education.

If you have any queries about this initiative, speak to child protection or your agency.

### Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund

You are eligible to apply for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which provides payments for eligible students to attend camps, sports and excursions. Payments will go directly to the school and will be linked to the student. For more information, visit the **Department of Education and Training** website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/csef.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/csef.aspx</a>>.

### Voluntary government school fees

You should only pay the compulsory components and not the voluntary contribution components of government school fees. While government schools may invite voluntary financial contributions, these should not be paid for children and young people in out-of-home care, including:

- contributions to a building or a library trust fund
- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (for example, additional computers or student-related services)
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.

#### Useful resources

- ▶ Parent payments in Victorian Government schools policy at the Department of Education and Training <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx</a>
- ▶ Tuition fee exemptions at the Department of Education and Training <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/learners/vet/Pages/feeexemptions.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/learners/vet/Pages/feeexemptions.aspx</a>>
- Youth allowance and Abstudy information at Australian Government Department of Health and Human Services Centrelink <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink</a>

# **Student Support Services**

Student Support Services comprise a broad range of professionals, including psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists, social workers and visiting teachers, to assist children and young people who are faced with learning barriers to achieve their educational and developmental potential.

### **Education First Youth Foyers**

Youth foyers break the cycle of homelessness by providing young people aged 16 to 24 years with safe, secure and affordable housing on campus for two years, while they study towards a career. Foyers are based in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) campuses in Glen Waverley, Broadmeadows and Shepparton – each houses 40 young people in customised studio-style accommodation with shared communal areas, and is supervised by trained staff 24 hours a day.

Support services include career guidance, employment assistance, mentoring, mental and physical health support, life skills development, and assistance with involvement in volunteering and community activities.

#### **SAFEMinds**

SAFEMinds is a learning and resource package for schools, carers and families that was developed by the Victorian Government in partnership with Headspace and the National Youth Mental Health Foundation.

#### It aims to:

- enhance early intervention mental health support for children and young people in schools, specifically regarding mild mood disorders (anxiety and depression) and self-harm
- increase engagement of parents and carers with schools, to more effectively support the child or young person's mental health
- develop clear and effective referral pathways between schools and community youth and mental health services.

#### Useful resources

- ➤ SAFEMinds at the Department of Education and Training <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/safeminds.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/safeminds.aspx>
- ▶ **Safe Schools Coalition** support for gender and sexually diverse students <a href="http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/">http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/</a>
- Raising expectations: Improving educational outcomes for young people in out-of-home care <a href="https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/raising-expectations/">https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/raising-expectations/</a>

# Supporting students with additional needs

There are resources, strategies and supports for children and young people who have additional needs, or face particular barriers in attending school.

# Children and young people with disabilities and additional needs

Some children and young people with disabilities and additional needs may experience difficulty with:

- navigating the social dynamics of the classroom
- coping with frustration and embarrassment
- learning to self-regulate their behaviour.

Identifying a child or young person's underlying learning needs, providing tailored support and modifying the educational program should increase their engagement in learning and improve their opportunities for success.

If you are concerned that the child or young person in your care may be having difficulties at school or are worried about their behaviour.

you should contact their school and speak with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

# Children and young people identifying as same-sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex

Research has shown that gender and sexually diverse students in Australia can struggle at school and are often the victims of homophobia, which can negatively impact on their experience at school and their learning.

Safe Schools is a formal and public commitment that schools make to create an inclusive and safe environment for their school community, including for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, their families and teachers. This commitment recognises that creating a safe and inclusive environment is key to tackling bullying, discrimination and harassment at schools, particularly arising from homophobia and transphobia.

All students should be safe from bullying and feel included at school. Students who don't

feel safe or included at school cannot learn effectively.

To get involved, contact the Safe Schools Unit by calling (03) 9637 3690 (for parents, carers and students), by email at <safe.schools@edumail.vic.gov.au>, or visit the Department of Education and Training <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx>">health/Pages/safe-sch

# Discrimination and bullying at school

Bullying is a serious issue for everyone in a school community. It can happen anywhere, anytime, and can have devastating consequences for a child or young person. Bullying is harmful behaviour that can be physical, social or psychological. It happens when someone uses words or actions against a person or a group of people to cause them distress or harm. It is often related to using power over someone, or trying to make them feel helpless.

Discrimination is treating someone unfairly or unjustly because of their gender, background, culture, race, religion, disability, sexuality, identity or other reason.

Discrimination and bullying can be a particular issue for children and young people who live in out-of-home care and may be made worse if they have a disability, are from a different racial or cultural background, religion, or identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

Discrimination and verbal and physical abuse can have significant impacts on a child or young person's wellbeing, including an increased risk of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour or thoughts, and self-harm.

Discrimination and bullying have received more attention in recent years, particularly with greater access to social media, and increased concerns about new forms of bullying, such as cyber bullying, that are prevalent among children and young people.

### **Tackling bullying**

It is important to talk to the child or young person in your care about bullying and, if it is an issue, consider ways to address it.

Encourage the child or young person to talk about what happened. If they want to try to deal with the bullying themselves, discuss strategies and set a short period of time to see if they can resolve the situation. Tell them that reporting the bullying is okay and reassure them it is not their fault.

Encourage the child or young person to:

- try to act unimpressed or unaffected
- use other strategies to diffuse the situation (such as agreeing in an offhand way with the bullying when they say offensive or negative things – this is known as fogging)
- say 'No!' firmly
- talk to the teacher or another staff member, such as a school guidance officer
- act confidently, even when they don't feel it.

Practice some strategies at home with the child or young person to help them to:

- stand and walk in a way that appears more confident
- give a quick reply to surprise or disarm the other child or young person
- use a routine response (such as 'okay whatever') that implies they are not bothered

Talk about what doesn't work with bullying, including:

- fighting back
- bullying the bully
- ignoring it
- playing with a different group of friends
- remaining silent about the problem.

Give the child or young person the Kids Helpline telephone number (1800 55 1800) to use if they want to talk to someone other than the school, or if you don't feel able to support them. If you feel unable to deal with this issue and are concerned about their wellbeing, you should talk to their child protection worker or agency case manager.

- ▶ **Bully Stoppers** a program that supports students, parents and carers, teachers and principals in working together to make sure schools are safe and supportive places at Department of Education and Training
  - <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/pledge.aspx>
- ▶ Services and support organisations that can help with bullying issues include:
  - ▶ **Kids Helpline**, call 1800 55 1800 <a href="https://kidshelpline.com.au/">https://kidshelpline.com.au/</a>>
  - **Beyondblue** information line, call 1300 22 4636
  - **Lifeline**, call 13 11 14
  - SuicideLine, call 1300 651 251
  - Racismnoway <a href="http://www.racismnoway.com.au/">http://www.racismnoway.com.au/</a>
  - ReachOut has resources and a discussion forum in relation to bullying <a href="https://au.reachout.com/">https://au.reachout.com/</a>
  - National Centre Against Bullying <a href="https://www.ncab.org.au/">https://www.ncab.org.au/</a>

# Post-school opportunities, TAFE and university

In Years 10, 11 and 12, young people start thinking about what they will do when they leave school. This might include study at TAFE, university, an apprenticeship or employment. Study and training can open up many possibilities for young people in their work and personal life.

It is important that young people who have grown up or spent time in out-of-home care are encouraged and supported, like any other young person, to pursue and aspire to higher education, and develop their knowledge and skill through formal study. This will help to prepare them for the next phase of their life, and provide more options for meaningful employment and a career.

Talking to the young person in your care and their school about these options will help them to think about and identify areas of interest, strengths, and possibilities for future study and employment.

As well as the young person's learning mentor (who is assigned by the school), there may be teachers they get on well with who they can talk to, or other adults they trust. Each school has a careers counsellor, who can also provide support and guidance. Many TAFEs and universities have open days and different activities, which schools should know about.

These open days give young people an opportunity to see the environment, ask existing students questions, get a feel for the

place, gain ideas about career paths and subjects to study, and feel less daunted about higher education.

# Higher education and university services to support care leavers

Several TAFEs and universities in Victoria provide specific support services for young people leaving out-of-home care, who want to pursue further education. While services will vary, they can include counselling services, mentoring programs and scholarships.

TAFEs and universities may also provide support with application forms, understanding FEE-HELP, guidance about the different courses, and liaising with departments to advocate for young people. Often, there are other services to help them feel more prepared for the course they want to study.

Many TAFEs and universities have specific centres, services and supports to assist Aboriginal students in their study. This may include a designated physical space, use of computers and printers, free tutoring, and information on financial assistance.

## Reconnect program

Reconnect seeks to support and engage with eligible learners aged 15-24 who have left school without completing Year 12 and are not in education, training or full-time employment, or are aged 20-24 and completed Year 12, but have been unemployed for more than 12 months.

The program can:

- assess the young person's learning and nonlearning needs and career goals, and develop an agreed learning plan
- provide support to assist young people to commence and stay in vocational training
- arrange supervised workplace experience to increase employability, as well as provision of support to assist students who are transitioning to employment or further training.

# Local Learning and Employment Networks

There are 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in Victoria and the goal of each is to support young people aged 10–19 years old, within its geographic boundaries, by improving their participation, engagement, attainment and transition outcomes.

LLENs are made up of a range of groups and organisations including:

- education and training providers
- business and industry
- community agencies
- parent and family organisations.

LLENs have a particular focus on young people at risk of disengaging, or who have already disengaged, from education and training and are not in meaningful employment.

- Myfuture <a href="https://myfuture.edu.au/">https://myfuture.edu.au/</a>
- Study assist <a href="http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/StudyAssist/">http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/StudyAssist/</a>>
- ▶ Department of Education and Training <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx</a>
- Support to Indigenous students through Indigenous Higher Education Units located in universities around Victoria <a href="https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/indigenous-higher-education-units">https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/indigenous-higher-education-units</a>

# **Employment assistance**

### **Transition to Work**

The Commonwealth Government's Transition to Work is a service to support young people aged 15–21 on their journey to employment. It provides intensive, pre-employment support to improve the work readiness of young people and help them into work (including apprenticeships and traineeships) or education.

Transition to Work will help young people:

- develop practical skills to get a job
- connect with education or training
- find and complete work experience placements
- find job opportunities in the local area
- connect with relevant local community services.

### **Jobactive**

The Commonwealth Government funds a network of jobactive services across 1,700 locations in Australia to provide employment services to employers and job seekers. They work closely with job seekers, tailoring services to their assessed needs, so they can find and keep a job.

A jobactive service will organise a face-to-face meeting with the job seeker to develop a Job Plan, which will set out all of the activities the job seeker should do to help them find work, such as job searches and activities like Work for the Dole. See *useful resources* for where to find further information.

Services for job seekers include:

- help to look for work, write a résumé and prepare for interviews
- referrals to jobs in the local area and help to relocate for work if they are interested
- help to become job ready, including targeted training that is suited to the skills that local employers need
- individualised support (called case management), so they are ready to take up and keep a job
- support to complete Work for the Dole, or other eligible activities, that provide work-like experiences
- help to learn new skills and improve their chances of finding a job.

### Indigenous employment

The Australian Government has a number of employment programs and assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For information, email <jobs@atsijobs.com.au>.

Programs and assistance include:

- Health Heroes information on the range of health jobs, training options and career pathways available to Indigenous Australians looking for work, studying or training
- Indigenous cadetship support
- Indigenous careers
- Indigenous Wage Subsidy
- Jobactive helping Indigenous Australians.

### **Disability Employment Services**

Disability Employment Services provide specialist employment assistance to help people with disability, injury or health conditions to find and keep suitable employment. It also provides support to their employers where required.

- ▶ Disability Employment Services <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink</a>>
- ▶ Indigenous employment <a href="http://www.australia.gov.au/">http://www.australia.gov.au/>
- ▶ **JobAccess** provides information about supporting workers with a disability, for people with a disability, their co-workers, employers, and Disability Employment Services providers. Call a JobAccess adviser on 1800 464 800 or visit <a href="https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/">https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/</a>
- jobactive <a href="https://jobactive.gov.au/">https://jobactive.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ Local disability employment services a young person can directly register with a Disability Employment Services provider in their area without going to Centrelink
- Myfuture provides information about career planning, education and training options, VTAC courses, pathways to prepare for university studies, support and mentoring <a href="https://www.myfuture.edu.au/">https://www.myfuture.edu.au/</a>
- ▶ Transition to Work <a href="https://www.employment.gov.au/transition-work">https://www.employment.gov.au/transition-work</a>



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# 12. Health

# The importance of health

In general, children and young people in out- of-home care experience an increased level of unmet health needs, compared with peers of the same age. A child or young person's experience of abuse and trauma impacts significantly on their health and wellbeing.

Some children and young people in out-of-home care may have health needs that have not been attended to, and may have experienced significant developmental delay due to physical and environmental factors. Unmet health needs or poor health may negatively influence other aspects of a child or young person's life. For example, poor eyesight may have an impact on their education or participation in sport.

Behavioural issues that arise from developmental delay or history of trauma and attachment disruptions are often a child or young person's only way of communicating their distress or needs. These issues can mean that learning needs go unrecognised, and healthy communication and relationships are hard to establish.

Children and young people may also develop health issues during their time in care, so your role in supporting their physical and emotional health is very important.

# General health and wellbeing

# Health requirements for a child or young person in out-of-home care

A child or young person coming into care for the first time (or for the first time during the current period of child protection involvement) should have a medical, dental, optical and auditory assessment, as soon as possible, or within one month of entering care. Child protection or your agency will discuss with you how to ensure this occurs. It is also a requirement that the child or young person's health needs are monitored annually, or more frequently if required.

When the child or young person first comes into your care, ask child protection for a template to record medical appointments. They will need this information to include in their records. Keep a complete health history and, if possible, use the same health professionals to support proper healthcare for the child or young person.

Where possible, a child or young person should keep visiting their existing doctor or paediatrician for their healthcare. If they do need to change doctors, it is important that the medical records are obtained for the new clinic. The child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager can support you with this process.

One of the most important ways to look after a child or young person's health is to gather their relevant medical and psychosocial history, so that any health professional is able to make a thorough assessment. In addition to physical aspects of health, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing are important aspects of the child or young person's overall health and wellbeing.

Authority to provide consent for a child or young person to undergo a health assessment or treatment varies depending on the type of Children's Court order to which the child or young person is subject. The child protection worker has responsibility for obtaining consent from the appropriate person to enable health assessment or treatment to occur, and for liaising with the general practitioner (GP) or specialist medical practitioners to obtain feedback, on behalf of the care team.

#### **Health considerations**

For all children and young people in out-ofhome care, there are health issues that should be considered, including:

- general health issues to be checked by a GP
- up-to-date immunisations
- dental care
- optical and auditory testing
- specialist assessments for example, paediatric developmental assessment, cognitive assessment, speech development, fine and gross motor development
- counselling and psychological assessment
- alcohol and other drug use
- sexual and reproductive health.

Information on all general health matters can be found at the Better Health Channel. It is a trusted, comprehensive and easy-to-understand health and medical information website – see *useful resources*.

# Decisions regarding a child or young person's health

As a kinship carer, if you have a carer authorisation letter (known as an instrument of authorisation), you may be able to make decisions about:

- arranging routine medical care and health checks from a doctor
- consenting to a check by the school nurse, or maternal and child health services
- consenting to diagnostic tests recommended by a doctor or dentist
- arranging childhood immunisations as set out in the Victorian Immunisation Schedule
- arranging routine dental care provided by a dentist, including dental check-ups and routine treatment (see the *dental care* section later in this chapter)
- signing for prescriptions at a pharmacy and administering medication prescribed by a doctor or dentist.

You are not able to:

- approve or consent to surgical interventions or contraception
- arrange for orthodontic treatment.

For young people, usually 14 years and over (but they could be younger), a doctor can assess whether they understand the nature of the medical treatment and can provide informed consent for a medical service, without the need for their parent or carer to consent.

This principle applies regardless of whether the child or young person is in out-of-home care or not. This is particularly relevant for young women receiving contraception, but it applies generally for access to healthcare professionals and treatment.

You should update child protection or your agency about the outcome of any medical appointment for the child or young person in your care.

#### Medicare

Medicare is Australia's universal health scheme. Through Medicare, children and young people in out-of-home care receive free treatment in a public hospital, as well as reduced costs for out-of-hospital care.

Services partly or fully funded by Medicare include:

- consultation fees for doctors, including specialists and psychologists
- tests and examinations by doctors, including x-rays and pathology tests
- eye tests performed by optometrists
- most surgical and other therapeutic procedures performed by doctors
- some surgical procedures performed by approved dentists.

Please note that if the birth of the child or young person was not registered, this will impact access to health services such as Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Medical Scheme and Health Care Cards. See the section on birth certificates in *Chapter 4*.

#### Medicare card

A child or young person in your care is eligible for services funded through Medicare with a valid Medicare card (or a valid Medicare number). If parents are unwilling or unable to provide a Medicare card or number, your agency or child protection can obtain these, provided the child or young person is either already registered with or eligible to be registered with Medicare.

If the child or young person is subject to an order of greater than six months duration, child protection or the agency can apply for a card in their name.

If you take a child or young person to a doctor and you do not have a Medicare card, the doctor can check if they have a Medicare number for bulkbilling purposes. If you have to pay for the medical service, you can be reimbursed by making a claim to Medicare, even if they are not on your Medicare card.

Young people aged 15 years or over can obtain their own Medicare card, or in some circumstances, if they are aged under 15 years.

#### **Health Care Card**

All children and young people in out-of-home care are entitled to a Health Care Card from Centrelink, either in their own name or by being added to your Health Care Card, if you have one.

A Health Care Card entitles the child or young person to:

- bulkbilling for doctor's appointments, decided by the doctor
- greater refunds for medical expenses through the Medicare safety net
- lower cost prescriptions
- assistance with hearing services through the Office of Hearing Services.

You can apply directly for the child or young person's Health Care Card, using a range of acceptable evidence for eligibility (such as a document or letter from child protection or your agency to show they are in your day-to-day care). This evidence does not necessarily include a protection order or a birth certificate. If required, child protection or your agency can help you with this.

#### **Ambulance** assistance

Victorians who are eligible for a Health Care Card receive free clinically necessary ambulance cover throughout Australia. This cover will provide free emergency and medically authorised non-emergency ambulance transport to the nearest and most appropriate hospital.

#### **Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme**

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) ensures that prescription medicine is provided at affordable prices. To be eligible for the PBS, you need to provide the child or young person's Medicare card or Medicare number, and the pharmacist will automatically reduce the cost of your medicine.

### Closing the Gap – PBS Co-payment Measure

The Closing the Gap PBS Co-payment Measure improves access to PBS medicines for eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are living with, or at risk of, chronic disease. Closing the Gap prescriptions attract a lower or nil patient co-payment for PBS medicines.

- ▶ Ambulance Victoria transport for Health Care Card holders <a href="https://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/">https://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ **Better Health Channel** you can search an A–Z of health information <a href="https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/">https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ Health Care Card application <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/forms/ss050">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/forms/ss050</a>
- Maternal Child and Health Line, call 13 22 29, 24 hours, seven days a week
- ▶ Parent Help Line, call 13 22 89 (provides advice from social workers and psychologists)
- Medicare cards for children and young people in out-of-home care <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/medicare-card">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/medicare-card</a>
- ▶ Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme http://www.pbs.gov.au/pbs/home
- ▶ Closing the Gap PBS Co-Payment Measure <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/health-professionals/services/medicare/closing-gap-pbs-co-payment-measure">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/health-professionals/services/medicare/closing-gap-pbs-co-payment-measure</a>

# **Aboriginal health**

Using Aboriginal health services helps Aboriginal children and young people receive a culturally appropriate service to meet their health and social needs.

Aboriginal people view health as something that connects all aspects of life. It is 'not just the physical wellbeing of the individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community' (Victorian Aboriginal Health Service).

## Aboriginal health services

The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) is the peak body for all Aboriginal community controlled

health organisations in Victoria. Aboriginal health services across Victoria can be found at <a href="http://www.vaccho.org.au/om/our-membership/members/">http://www.vaccho.org.au/om/our-membership/members/</a>>.

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) based in Fitzroy provides healthcare, assessments and education to the Aboriginal community. The service operates five days a week, and on Saturdays between the hours of 9.30 am and 12.30 pm for people with an emergency.

The Victorian Aboriginal Spectacle Subsidy is administered by the Australian College of Optometry, in partnership with ACCOs and a network of optometrists in regional Victoria.

- For up-to-date information on dental services for Aboriginal children and young people, contact your local ACCO health service, call (03) 9411 9411 or visit the **VACCHO** website for information on Aboriginal health services <a href="http://www.vaccho.org.au/">http://www.vaccho.org.au/</a>
- ▶ The Australian College of Optometry has primary care optometry services for Aboriginal people at locations around Melbourne that operate in partnership with the Victorian Eyecare Service. To arrange an appointment at any of the clinics, contact each site directly at:
  - Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, 186 Nicholson St, Fitzroy. Call (03) 9419 3301
  - Bunurong Health Service, 3 Carroll Ave, Dandenong. Call (03) 9794 5933
  - The Gathering Place Health Service Unit, 1-2, 7 Wedge Street, Werribee. Call (03) 8742 3144
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service is a free service for children, young people and adults at 186 Nicholson St, Fitzroy. Call (03) 9419 3000 or visit <a href="http://www.vahs.org.au/">http://www.vahs.org.au/</a>
- Victorian Aboriginal spectacle subsidy scheme <a href="http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=1090">http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/programs-projects?pid=1090</a>
- WADJA Aboriginal Family Place at the Royal Children's Hospital. Call (03) 9345 6111 or visit <a href="http://www.rch.org.au/afsu/">http://www.rch.org.au/afsu/</a>

## Maternal and child health

Maternal and child health services offer 10 free key ages-and-stages consultations for all children aged 0–6 years.

At these consultations, the maternal and child health nurse reviews the child's health, growth and development, and records information in the child's My Health and Development Record (commonly known as the 'green book').

At particular stages, there are more specific assessments, (for example, related to hearing and vision). If you do not have the child's 'green book', the nurse may be able to access the child's records, if the previous centre is known.

All consultations are free, and you can discuss your concerns, talk about your caring experiences, and explore ways to improve the child's health, growth and development.

## Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Initiative

As part of the Roadmap for Reform, the Victorian Government has committed to work with Koorie communities to help deliver a more culturally responsive maternal and child health service through ACCOs and current service providers.

For more information, see the **Department of Education and Training** website at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/amchigrants.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/amchigrants.aspx</a>.

### Maternal and child health consultations

All children and their families (including you as the carer) can expect to attend several

maternal and child health consultations, including:

- a home visit soon after birth
- consultations at two, four and eight weeks of age
- consultations at four, eight, 12 and 18 months of age
- consultations at two, and three and a half years of age.

Most maternal and child health centres offer scheduled appointments, open consultation (drop-in) sessions and some after-hours appointments. The service is free, is provided 52 weeks of the year, and is supported by the 24-hour Maternal and Child Health Line, which you can call on 13 22 29.

## **Immunisation**

The National Immunisation Program protects against infection, saves lives and protects those who are too young or too sick to be immunised. You may not know if a child or young person's immunisations are up to date when they first come into your care, so it is important to make sure that you, your family and the child or young person in your care are all up to date with their immunisations, to ensure you are all protected.

Ask your doctor if there are any additional immunisations recommended for people caring for children and young people. Children and young people are eligible to receive vaccines for free under the National Immunisation Program and some vaccines are funded by the Victorian Government. Ask your doctor or immunisation

provider which vaccines are recommended for children or young people in your care.

A number of immunisation programs are available for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Free vaccinations under the National Immunisation Program can be accessed through community-controlled Aboriginal Medical Services, local health services or GPs.

### **Immunisation history**

All children and young people coming into care will need to have their immunisation history checked by an immunisation provider to determine if catch-up vaccinations are required. GPs can check the Australian Immunisation Register to look at a child's immunisation history. In Victoria, GPs and local governments are the main providers of immunisation services.

Immunisations set out in the current National Immunisation Program schedule are considered to be routine medical care.

An instrument of authorisation (also known as a carer authorisation) from child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency may allow you to consent to a child or young person's immunisations. If, for a medical reason, they cannot safely be immunised, a specific exclusion will be noted on the carer authorisation and in the Child Health Record (green book).

You can provide a GP with permission to give vaccines to a child in your care, if an instrument of authorisation (carer authorisation) has been provided by child protection.

A specific exclusion for a medical reason will require a GP to complete a medical exemption form and submit it to the Australian Immunisation Register.

#### Immunisation records

The Australian Immunisation Register is a national register that records all vaccinations given any person immunised in Australia.

Visit the **Australian Immunisation Register** section on the Australian Government Department of Human Services website for more information on how to obtain an immunisation history statement at <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-immunisation-register">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-immunisation-register</a>.

#### **Catch-up immunisations**

If the child or young person in your care has missed vaccines on the National Immunisation Program schedule, you can talk to a GP or immunisation provider to arrange a catch-up plan for free vaccines. They can electronically check the child or young person's immunisation status with the Australian Immunisation Register and decide which immunisations are needed.

# Immunisation requirements for kindergarten and childcare

The Victorian Government requires all children to be up to date with their immunisations to be enrolled in childcare or kindergarten in Victoria. If the child in your care requires catch-up immunisations, they are eligible to enrol and commence at the service under a 'grace period' provision, while you bring their immunisations up to date. After the child is immunised,

you need to provide an immunisation status certificate to the childcare centre or kindergarten.

The best document to provide is an Immunisation History Statement from the Australian Immunisation Register. This statement is a valid immunisation status certificate. Your GP or immunisation provider can also provide this certificate.

If there is information missing from the child's immunisation history statement, please let child protection or your agency know. They will contact the immunisation provider, who can update the child's immunisation details on the Australian Immunisation Register.

# Immunisation requirements for benefit payments

To receive Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement and the Child Care Benefit, the child or young person needs to be up to date with their immunisations, according to the Australian Immunisation Register, or have a medical exemption or a catch-up schedule in place.

The National Immunisation Program schedule specifies the age at which children and young people should receive certain immunisations. Most of those immunisations are linked to family assistance payments. If you have any questions about these benefits, visit the **Centrelink** website at <a href="https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/centrelink">https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/centrelink</a>.

- ▶ Immunise Australia Program <a href="http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/about-immunisation-registers">http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/about-immunisation-registers</a>
- ▶ Immunisation information <a href="https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation">https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation</a>
- ▶ No jab, no play immunisation required for kindergarten <a href="https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/vaccination-children/no-jab-no-play">https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/vaccination-children/no-jab-no-play</a>
- ▶ National Immunisation Schedule <a href="http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/national-immunisation-program-schedule">http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/national-immunisation-program-schedule</a>
- Immunise Australia program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people <a href="http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people">http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people</a>
- Vaccination for our mob <a href="http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/">http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/</a> Content/atsi-mob-report>
- ▶ The Maternal and Child Health Line call 13 22 29, 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- ▶ Parent Help Line (provides advice by social workers and psychologists), call 13 22 89
- Information sheets about **immunisation for children in out-of-home care** *<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/factsheets/immunisation-children-out-of-home-care>*

### **Dental** care

#### Routine dental care

In Victoria, children and young people in out-ofhome care have priority access to public dental services. This means they are offered the next available appointment for general care and are not placed on a waiting list.

Routine dental treatment includes:

- dental check-ups and advice
- dental sealants to prevent decay
- teeth cleaning
- fillings
- extraction of baby teeth.

Dental care is provided at the Royal Dental Hospital Melbourne and at more than 80 community dental clinics throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria – see *useful resources*. When you are making an appointment, tell the clinic staff that the child and young person lives in out-of-home care, so they are given priority.

Dental services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are available through the VAHS and Dental Health Services Victoria. See *useful resources* for contact details.

If there is any delay in accessing these services due to a lack of availability of the service, talk to child protection or your agency and they can try to resolve the issue with the department. This does not apply to the VAHS dental service, as it is funded by the Commonwealth Government.

### Specialist dental care

Specialist dental care may be provided on referral from a public dental clinic to the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne. If the child or young person in your care requires specialist dental care, talk to child protection or your agency about receiving this as a specified decision on your carer authorisation. Emergency dental care is free for children and young people in statutory out-of-home care.

A child or young person can be eligible for referral to the Royal Dental Hospital by a dentist or doctor, if they:

- are very young children with advanced decay
- have behavioural difficulties
- have abnormal patterns of dental growth, for example, extra teeth, orthodontic problems
- may require a general anaesthetic for dental treatment
- have genetic dental problems
- have sustained dental and orofacial trauma.

#### Useful resources

- ▶ Dental Health Services Victoria, call (03) 93411000 or visit <a href="https://www.dhsv.org.au/home">https://www.dhsv.org.au/home</a>
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, call (03) 9419 3000 or visit <a href="http://www.vahs.org.au/">http://www.vahs.org.au/</a>
- ▶ **Dental services for children in out-of-home care** see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/health/dental-health-services">health/dental-health-services</a>
- Specialist dental care the Department of Dentistry at the Royal Children's Hospital has information on the full range of dental services in Victoria, including services for children and young people with special or complex needs. Call (03) 9345 5344 or visit <a href="http://www.rch.org.au/dentistry/">http://www.rch.org.au/dentistry/</a>

# Eye and ear care

Eye examinations can be conducted by a qualified optometrist in your local area. Medicare provides a subsidy for eye examinations at a local optometrist for an initial check, and ongoing, in cases where clinical symptoms warrant further checks. Most optometrists provide a bulkbilling service for a vision check, and you should check there are no extra costs when you make an appointment.

To find an optometrist in your area, call (03) 9668 8500 or visit the **Optometry Australia** website at <a href="http://www.optometry.org.au/">http://www.optometry.org.au/</a>>.

It is important that a child or young person's hearing is tested at an audiology clinic. There are a number of publicly funded clinics in Victoria, but there may be waiting lists for some services. To find the closest service to you, call (03) 9877 2727 or visit the **Audiology Australia** website at <a href="https://audiology.asn.au/">https://audiology.asn.au/</a>>.

# Victorian Aboriginal Spectacle Subsidy Scheme

The Closing the Gap initiative provides subsidised visual aids (spectacles/glasses) to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Victoria. It allows people to access a specifically designed pair of frames with the prescribed lens for a contribution of nominal fee.

Contact the Lead Optometrist Aboriginal Services at the Australian College of Optometry on (03) 9349 7400 for more information.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Ear care Audiology Australia <a href="https://audiology.asn.au/">https://audiology.asn.au/>
- ▶ Eye care Optometry Australia <a href="http://www.optometry.org.au/">http://www.optometry.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Aboriginal services at the Australian College of Optometry <a href="http://www.aco.org.au/eye-care-services/eye-care-in-rural-victoria/aboriginal-services">http://www.aco.org.au/eye-care-services/eye-care-in-rural-victoria/aboriginal-services</a>
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service call (03) 9419 3000 or visit <a href="http://www.vahs.org.au/">http://www.vahs.org.au/</a>

## **Medication**

When administrating prescribed medication to a child or young person in your care, you need to follow the directions provided by the prescribing doctor or pharmacist.

You can give them over-the-counter medications as part of their routine care. The administration of medication should be discussed with the pharmacist, and the dose must be given in accordance with the child or young person's age or weight. If they do not respond to the medication and improve within a reasonable time period, they should be taken to a doctor.

You need to let the pharmacist know if the child or young person is on prescription medication for a pre-existing condition, to ensure there is no interaction of medications.

Children and young people who are on long-term medication should have their treatment reviewed regularly by their doctor, and information about their treatment must be provided to the care team.

### **Medication refusal**

If a child or young person refuses to take their prescription medication, you should address the situation in an age-appropriate manner. Never force them to take medication.

Contact the doctor or dentist who prescribed the medication to tell them that the child or young person is refusing it and ask for advice. This is something the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager needs to know about, so they can also provide you with advice and support.

## **Medication recording**

Generally, you will not be required to record a child or young person's use of prescribed and over-the-counter medication. Child protection or your agency will keep records of their medical and dental assessments, including records of immunisations, and pass these to the child or young person, their family or another relevant agency, if they move from your care.

When the child or young person first comes into your care, ask child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency if they have an easy template you can use to record medical

appointments. They will need this information to include in their records. Records are important, not only to demonstrate active, ongoing engagement with the child or young person about their health needs, but also to transfer knowledge about their health, if they leave your care.

### After-hours medical attention

For non-urgent after-hours care, you can call NURSE-ON-CALL for advice and assistance on any medical issue. NURSE-ON-CALL is a phone service that provides immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This helpline is free and can be accessed for the cost of a local or mobile phone on 1300 60 60 24.

Services are available after hours when there is no medical emergency but medical care is required. Information about finding the closest GP after-hours service is in the useful resources below. You should check with the service about the cost of a visit.

# **Urgent medical attention**

If a child or young person in your care is having a medical emergency, you should call 000 or take them immediately to the closest emergency department in a public hospital.

If the medical emergency is a matter of urgency where medical treatment needs to be performed to save their life, prevent serious damage to their health, or prevent suffering or continuing to suffer significant pain and distress, there is no requirement for the doctor to seek consent if they are satisfied that medical treatment is required as a matter of urgency.

If a child or young person in your care requires urgent medical attention or a health intervention where consent is required, you must contact child protection or your agency, who will consult child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency prior to providing consent. A senior manager within child protection or your agency is authorised to provide consent. If you are unable to contact child protection or your agency, the treating doctor can make a decision.

- ▶ Better Health Channel <a href="https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/">https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ **Health Direct** after-hours GP health line <a href="https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/after-hours-gp-helpline">https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/after-hours-gp-helpline</a>
- NURSE-ON-CALL call 1300 60 60 24
- List of public hospitals in Victoria < https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/public-hospitals-victoria>
- Administering medication see the Child Protection Manual for more information <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/health/administration-medication">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/health/administration-medication</a>

# Sexual and reproductive health

It is important to support children and young people with their sexual and reproductive health. Research shows that most young people in Years 10 to 12 in secondary school are sexually active in some way. Most teenagers do not practice safer sex every time (such as using condoms), leading to concerns around unintended pregnancies and sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

#### Sex education

Abuse experiences can make the task of sex education a delicate one, as it may revive painful memories, but it is important that it is actively addressed. Children and young people need age-appropriate information about safe and protective behaviours, consent and safer sex practices, including information about contraception, prevention of STIs, how to access STI screening and treatment, and pregnancy options counselling if necessary.

It is important that young people develop an understanding of positive, consensual, non-exploitative sexual relationships, and work towards becoming comfortable with their sexuality. When addressing a child or young person's sex education, you need to understand whether they have adequate age-appropriate knowledge about sexual development, and if applicable, contraception and sexual and reproductive health.

You and the care team should discuss who is the most suitable person or service to provide this education. Young people need accurate information about sex to negotiate sexual relationships safely and responsibly.

Sex education should also involve talking about sexual orientation and gender in a positive way, not assuming all people are opposite-sex attracted or the gender they were assigned at birth.

# Steps for building resilience and protection against sexual harm

The summarised key steps that you can take to build resilience, and protect children and young people from sexual harm include:

- ensuring they understand the difference between consenting, appropriate behaviour, including touching (such as between carer and child, or between teenage peers), and all types of abusive behaviour, including inappropriate touch, requests or demands for sexual acts, or physical sexual abuse, particularly where there is a significant age difference. This can be a difficult conversation, which requires awareness that a child or young person may feel shame or guilt about any previous sexually abusive experience
- encouraging them to feel comfortable telling you anything, especially if it involves another adult, and asking them to identify other trusted adults they can talk to in confidence
- learning about the people with whom they are spending time
- teaching them about their bodies. Give them the correct language to use when describing their body parts, and emphasise those parts that are considered private. Ask them the words they use for their private body parts

- observing how the adults in charge during activities interact with them. If you attend or participate in their activities, you will have a better opportunity to observe this. If you are concerned about anyone's behaviour, take it up with the organisation running the activities, or with child protection or your agency
- noticing when someone shows them a great deal of attention or begins giving them gifts.
   Take time to talk to the child or young person and find out why the person is acting in this way
- teaching them that they have the right to say no to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touch or actions by others. Ask them to tell you immediately if this happens. Reassure them that you are there to help and it is okay to tell you anything
- being sensitive to any changes in their behaviour or attitude. Encourage open communication and learn how to be an active listener. Look for and listen to small cues and clues that something may be troubling them, because they are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings. This may be because they are concerned about your reaction to their problems. If they do confide problems to you, try to remain calm, non-critical and nonjudgmental. Listen compassionately to their concerns and work with them to get the help they need to resolve the problem. Speak to their child protection worker or agency case manager if you need help with this

- practicing basic safety skills with them. Make an outing to a shopping centre or a park a 'teachable' experience in which they can practice checking with you, going to the bathroom with a friend, and locating the adults to go to if they need assistance
- being aware of safe internet practices, including on smartphones. Teach them never to give out their last name, address, or phone number to a person online, and never meet friends made online in person, without your supervision and consent. Help them choose an online name that does not disclose information about their location. Teach them not to post pictures with identifying information, such as a school uniform. Ask them to tell you immediately if they are concerned about what is happening online. Reassure them that you are there to help and it is okay to tell you anything
- reassuring them they will not get into trouble and shouldn't feel guilty.<sup>3</sup>

#### Sexualised behaviours

Sexualised play and sexual behaviours may be normal in children and young people as they explore who they are, test boundaries and work out what is and is not acceptable behaviour.

Children are usually easy to distract away from these behaviours, and their accompanying emotions and expressions of age-appropriate sexual play include laughter, spontaneity, curiosity and experimentation. Age-appropriate sexual behaviours do not require intervention by professionals.

<sup>3.</sup> Sourced from **Bravehearts**, an organisation that aims to educate and protect children and young people from sexual assault <a href="http://bravehearts.org.au/pages/help-advice.php">help-advice.php</a>>.

As a kinship carer of children and young people who have often experienced trauma and abuse, you must always be sensitive to the possibility that they are expressing some past or current sexual trauma through their behaviour. It is important to ensure your reactions to such behaviours are calm and non-punitive. If you are unsure and the behaviour is persistent, despite clear requests to stop, or the content of the behaviour is concerning, seek advice from child protection or your agency.

See *Information sheet 9* for a description of age-appropriate sexual behaviour in children and young people. Speak to child protection or your agency if you are unsure about any behaviours or need help addressing sexualised behaviours. For information on sexual exploitation, grooming, sexual assault services and responding to disclosures of sexual abuse, see *Chapter 16. Responding to critical incidents*.

Resources for talking with young people about relationships include:

- South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) <a href="http://www.secasa.com.au/">http://www.secasa.com.au/</a> information-sheets/>
- Yout Tube: Tea consent <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8</a>

- Dove evolution <a href="https://www.youtube.com/">https://www.youtube.com/</a> watch?v=iYhCnOif46U>
- Domestic Violence Resource Centre <a href="http://www.dvrcv.org.au/">http://www.dvrcv.org.au/</a>
- The Nookie Project provides training and consultation for professionals working with young people <a href="http://www.thenookieproject.org/">http://www.thenookieproject.org/</a>
- Love: The good, the bad and the ugly <a href="http://lovegoodbadugly.com/">http://lovegoodbadugly.com/</a>>
- Family Planning Victoria <a href="http://www.fpv.org.au/for-you/education/sex-education-talking-to-young-people">http://www.fpv.org.au/for-you/education/sex-education-talking-to-young-people</a>
- Tune in Not Out <www.tuneinnotout.com>
- The Line <a href="http://www.theline.org.au/">http://www.theline.org.au/</a>
- The Great Porn Experiment <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSF82AwSDiU></a>
- Is casual sex bad for you? <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Soe7yilFEJ8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Soe7yilFEJ8</a>
- The unsexy truth: the hookup culture <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKAehegqTvg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKAehegqTvg></a>
- Healthy relationships: Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria <a href="https://www.youtube.com/">https://www.youtube.com/</a> watch?v=UL4fPxW-nBQ>.

#### Useful resources

- Bravehearts <a href="https://bravehearts.org.au/">https://bravehearts.org.au/</a>
- Family Planning Victoria provides a range of information about sexual and reproductive health.

  Call 1800 013 952 or visit <a href="https://www.fpv.org.au/">www.fpv.org.au/</a>
- Teenagers and sexual issues <a href="https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/teenagers-and-sexual-issues">https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/teenagers-and-sexual-issues</a>
- ▶ Children with problem sexual behaviours and their families in the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/children-problem-sexual-behaviours-and-their/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/children-problem-sexual-behaviours-and-their/</a>
- Adolescents with sexually abusive behaviours in the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/adolescents-sexually-abusive-behaviours/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/adolescents-sexually-abusive-behaviours/</a>
- ▶ Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) for a list of CASAs in your area that can provide information and support <a href="http://www.casa.org.au/">http://www.casa.org.au/</a>
- ▶ The Out-of-Home Care Toolbox provides easily accessible information for the carers of young people (12–18) in out-of-home care <a href="http://oohctoolbox.org.au/">http://oohctoolbox.org.au/</a>
- Fourth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood-Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2014-2017
  - <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/ohp-bbvs-atsi>

## **Mental health**

Children and young people in out-of-home care are at increased risk of mental health problems due to their experiences of trauma and separation. Many services and sectors are involved directly or indirectly in promoting and restoring child and youth mental health. Talk to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you have concerns about their mental health.

Health services, including community health counselling services, student wellbeing and support staff in schools, GPs, psychologists, allied health services and school nurses are typically the first health point of contact for people seeking help. All these services provide interventions for children and young people with mild to moderate, and relatively uncomplicated mental health problems. They may also provide consultation and sometimes urgent access for those with more severe problems.

Paediatricians and professionals in private practice (such as psychiatrists and psychologists) are a substantial mental health resource. They provide more specialist care to children and young people with a broad range of moderate and severe emotional and behavioural problems, and mental health problems, including mood and eating disorders.

Specialist mental health services provide assessment and treatment for people with moderate to severe problems and disorders, from significant psychological distress and risk, to severe and complex disorders.

A specialist mental health assessment of a child or young person may be useful where they are presenting with challenging, difficult or concerning behaviours, such as:

- prolonged unhappiness, anxiety, anger
- serious sleeping or eating problems
- social withdrawal, refusal to attend school

- displaying unusual or odd behaviours (hearing voices)
- suicidal thoughts or self-harming behaviours.

#### **Better Access Initiative**

The Better Access initiative provides better access to mental health practitioners through Medicare for people with an assessed mental disorder, who would benefit from a structured approach to the management of treatment needs. The purpose of the Better Access Initiative is to improve treatment and management of mental illness within the community.

Referrals can be made by GPs managing a person under a General Practitioner Mental Health Treatment Plan, a psychiatrist or a paediatrician.

- ▶ Mental health assessments and treatment advice see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/health-medical/mental-health-assessments-and-treatment">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/health-medical/mental-health-assessments-and-treatment</a>
- ▶ Koorie Mental Health Program <a href="http://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/kmhp/">http://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/kmhp/>
- ▶ Chief Psychiatrist's guideline: Priority access for out-of-home care see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/protocols/education-medical/mental-health">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/protocols/education-medical/mental-health</a>
- ▶ headspace is the national youth mental health foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12–25 year olds, along with assistance in promoting young peoples' wellbeing <a href="https://headspace.org.au/">https://headspace.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Victoria's mental health services <www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealthservices/child/index.htm>
- ▶ Better Access initiative <a href="http://www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth-betteraccess">http://www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth-betteraccess</a>

# Alcohol and other drug treatment services

Drug and alcohol use can be an issue for children and young people in out-of-home care. Substance abuse can often mask trauma and emotional pain associated with the experience of abuse.

The goal of all alcohol and other drug treatment services is harm minimisation, which aims to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol and other drug use on individuals and communities. Alcohol and other drug treatment services recognise that the capacity and circumstances of a person will influence their recovery journey. For some, reducing the level, frequency and harm associated with alcohol and other drug use may be more attainable in the short term than abstinence.

Any support provided to a child or young person with alcohol or other drug use needs to take the impact of abuse and neglect into consideration. There are specialist alcohol and other drug services available across Victoria that address these issues.

Talk to child protection or your agency about local services that support the needs of the child or young person in your care. If you think they may need treatment, there are services you can contact as a carer for advice and referral. All alcohol and drug treatment services are expected to provide culturally safe environments for Aboriginal people, and also provide service models that meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

More information about **services for Aboriginal people** can be found on the Victorian Government health website at <a href="https://www2">https://www2</a>. health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/aod-treatment-services/aod-treatment-services-for-aboriginal-people>.

# Bunjilwarra: Koorie Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service

The VAHS and Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) jointly provide the Bunjilwarra Koorie Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service in partnership with the Victorian Government, VACCHO and ACCOs.

Bunjilwarra is a 12-bed residential rehabilitation and healing service for Aboriginal young people between 16 and 25 years of age. This is a statewide service situated on a site in Hastings. For more information, call (03) 5979 2011 or visit the **Bunjilwarra** website at <a href="http://bunjilwarra.org.au/">http://bunjilwarra.org.au/</a>.

### **Out-of-Home Care Toolbox**

The **Out-of-Home Care Toolbox** at <a href="http://oohctoolbox.org.au/">http://oohctoolbox.org.au/</a>> provides easily accessible and effective information for the carers of young people (aged 12–18) in out-of-home care.

## Youth, Drugs and Alcohol Advice

Youth, Drugs and Alcohol Advice (YoDAA) provides young people with alcohol and drug information, support options, a service finder and options for self-help. It also provides information, tools and advice for carers and family members on how to respond to



substance use by young people in their care, and to the impacts of substance use within the family. Call 1800 458 685 or visit *YoDAA* <a href="http://yodaa.org.au/">http://yodaa.org.au/</a>. Information is also available for professionals.

## **Youth Support and Advocacy Service**

The **YSAS** at <a href="http://www.ysas.org.au/">http://www.ysas.org.au/</a> provides a broad range of supports and treatment services, including assertive outreach, residential withdrawal and rehabilitation, supported housing, day programs and social enterprise, which enables vulnerable young people to re-engage with education and training, families and communities.

#### DirectLine

DirectLine is a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week telephone and online service that supports people seeking alcohol and other drug information, advice or referral to treatment. It is a statewide point of access to the alcohol and other drug treatment system, offering confidential advice and support to alcohol and drug users, their family, carers and friends. Call 1800 888 236 or visit **DirectLine** at <a href="https://www.directline.org.au/service-finder">www.directline.org.au/service-finder</a>.

If you have concerns about any drug and alcohol use by a child or young person in your care, talk to child protection or your agency. If you have immediate concern for their presentation and health, call 000 for an ambulance.



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### 13. A safe home environment

#### Ensuring a safe environment

Prior to the placement of a child or young person in your care, an assessment will be conducted to ensure that the placement is appropriate for the child or young person. The preliminary assessment of kinship carers is undertaken by child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency, prior to the placement commencing or, if this is not possible, within one week of placement.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will ensure that the placement is safe and suitable, and that with support, you can meet the immediate needs of the child or young person.

As part of this preliminary assessment, child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will check that the home and environment is suitable for the child or young person.

This may include checking whether:

- you live in a bushfire prone area, and if so, whether you have a fire safety plan
- there is age-appropriate space for the child or young person
- you are aware of SIDS and safe sleeping arrangements
- any swimming pools are appropriately fenced

- the house and yard are reasonably clean and hygienic
- there are any other hazards or risks that may impact the safety of the child or young person.

#### Comprehensive assessment

If the placement of the child or young person is likely to continue for more than three weeks, a more comprehensive assessment will be completed to assess the appropriateness of the placement and its capacity to meet the ongoing needs of the child or young person. This assessment should be completed within six weeks of the placement commencing.

Following the preliminary assessment, child protection or the agency will continue to monitor the safety of the home and environment through visits to your home.

#### Annual home and environment checks

A formal 12-month review of long-term kinship care arrangements is undertaken by child protection or your agency. As part of this, a formal check and review of the home and environment will occur to ensure the suitability for the child or young person.

# Creating a safe home and environment

**Kidsafe** is a non-government organisation that has resources for making homes, roads and pools safe for children and young people. Kidsafe is dedicated to preventing unintentional childhood injuries, and reducing the deaths and disabilities associated with injuries in children under the age of 15 years. For more information, visit <a href="http://www.kidsafe.com.au/">http://www.kidsafe.com.au/</a>>.

#### Blind and curtain cords

Check your blind and curtain cord safety.
Children have died in Australia from strangling themselves with a cord. A free safety kit is available from Consumer Affairs Victoria.
See *useful resources* for contact details.

#### Flat screen TVs

To avoid a flat screen TV falling and hurting a child or young person, it is recommended that the screen is secured. This can be done by mounting the TV on the wall, or there are safety straps available to secure the TV to a cabinet or a wall (refer to the manufacturer's instructions).

### Child restraints and where a child sits in the car

It is recommended that you keep up to date with the current regulations about child restraints for cars. Information about current regulations is available from **VicRoads**. Call 13 11 71 or visit <a href="https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/">https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/</a>>.

Children need different restraints as they grow. The restraint must be the right size for the child, properly fitted and fastened, and correctly fitted to the vehicle.

A child restraint is not considered approved for road rule compliance if it becomes too old. There are guidelines for the use of restraint products that are more than 10 years old. Some products have an expiry date stamped into them for guidance. See *useful resources* for more information.

#### Swimming pools and spas

Drowning is one of the major causes of accidental deaths in Australia. Toddlers can drown in as little as a few centimetres of water. It is crucial that when children and young people are near any water, they are supervised by a responsible adult at all times.

If you have a pool or spa at your home, you will need to be compliant with Victorian Building Authority pool and spa fence safety requirements. The home and environment check conducted by child protection will focus on all safety aspects of pools, spas, ponds or dams on a property.

#### Fire plans

Protecting the child or young person in your care from the risk of fire is paramount. Child protection or your agency will check whether the home and environment has any fire hazards.

If the child or young person in your care is on a child protection order or managed by child protection, and your home is located in one of the Victorian Fire Risk Register extreme fire risk areas, or is assessed as being a high bushfire risk area, you must have an up-to-date Client Bushfire Leaving Early Plan for days that are declared code red.

#### Code red days

Talk to child protection or your agency if you need support to create a fire safety plan.

They will help you to develop a Client Bushfire Leaving Early Pan, which you are required to follow in the event of a code red day. You may also need to consider summer holiday destinations if this may be in an extreme fire risk area.

A code red day signifies the worst conditions for bushfires and grassfires. Homes are not designed to withstand fires in these conditions. The safest place to be is away from high-risk bushfire areas. It is important that you develop processes to ensure that you are aware if the area you live in is subject to a code red day, such as regular access to a radio or mobile phone alerts.

In these circumstances, the department will direct you to leave your property the day before a code red day and relocate, unless you have an exemption. You are responsible for enacting the leaving early plans and to report no later than 9 am on the code red day that you have relocated.

If you have a child or young person in your care, your leaving early plan must outline your arrangements for leaving the night before a code red day.

#### Insurance and property damage

The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) is the insurer for the department, which has established a Volunteer Care Givers insurance cover. It applies to kinship care, foster care or pre-permanent care arrangements, and provides cover where, during a period of care, a child or young person causes damage to your property, either through accident, theft or malice.

Your agency or child protection should provide the VMIA with your details to assist with any claims. If you need to make a claim, speak to child protection or your agency about this process or contact VMIA. Call (03) 9270 6900 or email <contact@vmia.vic.gov.au>.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ **Kidsafe** is a non-government organisation that has resources for making homes, roads and pools safe for children and young people. Kidsafe is dedicated to preventing unintentional childhood injuries, and reducing the deaths and disabilities associated with injuries in children under the age of 15 years <a href="http://www.kidsafe.com.au/">http://www.kidsafe.com.au/</a>
- ▶ Child restraints see VicRoads <a href="https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/">https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ **Emergency preparedness policy** for clients and services on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness">https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness</a>
- ▶ Making an insurance claim see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/</a> advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/administration/insurance-claims>
- Kidsafe Victoria provides information about pool fence safety regulations https://www.kidsafevic.com.au/>
- ▶ Home environment check see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/</a> advice-and-protocols/advice/high-risk/home-environment-check/>



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# 14. Young people transitioning to independence

#### Planning for independence

Young people leave out-of-home care at various ages and for various reasons. Those who are moving from out-of-home care to independence are a particularly vulnerable group in our community. They often have to develop independent living skills and manage on their own much earlier than other young people.

If the young person in your care is moving to independence, you can play an important role in preparing them for their future as independent adults, by building their independence skills from the time they enter your care.

Preparation for leaving care is part of case planning, which means ensuring that young people leaving care have:

- opportunities over time to develop independent living skills
- involvement in decision making
- a transition plan
- essential documentation, possessions and life records.

If a young person is preparing to leave your care and move into another living situation, they require significant planning and support. Conversations around their transition need to happen well ahead of the time they will be

moving, to make sure that post-care support services are in place, and the young person is as prepared as possible for independence.

#### Planned and unplanned moves

A young person may leave your care in a planned or unplanned way.

A planned move is ideal for the young person, and for you and your family, because it allows you to work with the young person and child protection or agency to prepare a transition plan, and to have supports in place for them, well before they leave care.

At times, a young person may choose to move on more quickly than planned, as they attempt to manage their emotions and take control of their situation.

A young person may also choose to return to live with their parent/s, which can be difficult to understand or accept.

While you are supporting the young person through this significant and often stressful time in their life, make sure you also take time to look after yourself. Grief and loss is real in any situation of separation. Talk to child protection or your agency and seek out other carers, who are likely to understand what you are experiencing.

#### Access to information

Questions around a young person's background, culture and identity may arise at any time. It can be useful to talk to them about how they can apply for access to their departmental records while in out-of-home care, or at any point after they leave care.

A young person can request access from the department or from agencies that hold records relating to them. Requests for access can also be directed to the department's Freedom of Information Unit by calling 1300 650 172 or (03) 9096 8449. There is no cost for a young person who has been in care to access their own information under Freedom of Information.

Access to information about identity is also important for the young person in being aware of their cultural and spiritual identity. Link-Up Victoria can assist young people, aged 18 or over and residing in Victorian or Tasmania to:

- access records
- research family and cultural connections
- initiate contact with family members
- provide cultural advice and information
- access a range of other support services.

Call Link-Up Victoria on 1800 687 662 or visit the **Link-Up Victoria** website at <a href="http://linkupvictoria.org.au/">http://linkupvictoria.org.au/</a>>.

#### Getting a driver's licence

At age 16, a young person is able to get a learner permit that allows them to drive on the road with an experienced driver. They will need to complete 120 hours of supervised driving, including 10 hours at night, and record it in a learner log book. They will also need to have held a learner permit for at least 12 months, immediately prior to applying for a probationary driver license.

Whether you directly provide driving lessons for the young person in your care is your choice. Ask child protection or your agency if they have any suggestions or recommendations about this.

VicRoads has an L2P learner driver mentor program, which helps learners under 21 years, who do not have access to a supervising driver or vehicle, to gain the driving experience required to apply for a probationary license. There is also the potential of accessing leaving care brokerage to purchase some driving lessons, which you can discuss with the young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

#### Planning to leave

To ensure that young people are well prepared for immediate and long-term challenges, help them to consider:

- Who can they turn to for support once they leave care?
- What will they do when they leave care will they be studying, in an apprenticeship or working?
- What support do they have to help them how will they get to work or study, will work or study conflict with other responsibilities, and how can this be resolved?
- Where and who will they live with, and what help do they need to set up their own home?

- What Aboriginal-specific support services are available?
- What financial resources do they need will they receive income support, are they required to study, be in an apprenticeship or work to receive income support?
- Where will they receive health or other services they require?
- Do they have the skills to look after themselves – such as shopping, cooking, cleaning and budgeting?
- Do they know how to access services, such as health, housing and Commonwealth services?

#### Personal belongings

The young person who is transitioning out of care will need to take practical things with them when they leave, and they may need your help. You have a responsibility to make sure that when a young person leaves your care, they can take all their personal belongings, including:

- identification (ID)
- health records, birth certificate, Medicare card and Health Care Card (which can also be used as ID)
- school reports and records of achievement
- personal items
- items purchased for them, such as clothing, bedding or equipment
- photos of their extended family
- life story books or culture diary
- culturally specific belongings
- money that they have saved or earned.

#### Leaving care services

There is a range of services that young people can access to support their move on from your care. Make sure that the young person who is leaving your care is aware of these services, and help them access them if required.

#### **CREATE Foundation**

CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. CREATE connects children and young people to each other and their community through the clubCREATE membership program. Children and young people have access to connection events, and receive birthday cards, magazines, Entering Care Kits and Welcome Packs.

CREATE can support you in empowering the children and young people in your care to build self-confidence, self-esteem and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard, through programs such as Speak Up, CREATE Your Future, Youth Advisory Groups and Case Worker Training.

#### Go Your Own Way kit

A Go Your Own Way (leaving care) kit is a resource developed by CREATE for young people aged 15 and older, who are starting to plan for their transition to adulthood and independence. The kit has resources, information and useful links to help you and the young person plan for a successful transition.

If they have not received a kit, either you or the child or young person's case manager can contact the CREATE foundation. Call 1800 655 105 or email <a href="mailto:victoria@create.org.au">victoria@create.org.au</a>.

#### Leaving care hotline

The leaving care hotline is managed by Melbourne City Mission's Frontyard and is for young people and their carers. The hotline connects young people to their nearest post-care support program and helps with immediate issues, including crisis accommodation. Call 1300 532 846 or email <a href="mailto:rearrange">rearrange</a> mcm.org.au>.

#### Sortli

Sortli (short for 'sort out your life') is a free mobile app for young people to help with the transition from out-of-home care to independence. The app was designed by young people at CREATE and focuses on:

- identitying relationships
- finding a place to live
- health
- finances
- gaining education and looking for a job
- general living skills.

The app is available on Apple, Android or Microsoft mobile devices.

## Transition to Independent Living Allowance

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance is a payment from the Commonwealth Government to help young people aged

15–25 years who are leaving or have left outof-home-care. Funding of up to \$1,500 can be used towards the costs involved in moving to independent living.

Melbourne City Mission coordinate the applications, and can assist young people and their carers to determine if they are eligible and complete the application form. See *useful resources* for more information.

#### Help for young people leaving care

Help is available for young people who are leaving or have left out-of-home care in Victoria. The young person may need:

- help to stay in education or return to studying
- help to look for a job, or apply for on-the-job (vocational) training
- help or advice to keep a current job
- help to find accommodation or to stay in existing accommodation
- support to reconnect with family
- some financial help to maintain independence, if they have already left state care.

Young people can receive support from a case worker, as well as access to brokerage money for items such as accommodation, recreation, education and health. This support is accessed by the child protection worker or agency case manager, who completes the form, which is then forwarded to the most appropriate agency.

If the young person has left care, they can contact the Leaving Care Hotline by calling 1300 532 846 or email <leavingcare@mcm.org.au> to find their local support service.

The Leaving Care Mentoring Program aims to provide young people transitioning from care with opportunities to interact with adults in community settings. It promotes personal relationships and friendships that may continue after they have left care, to help avoid social isolation.

## Support for Aboriginal young people leaving care

The Aboriginal leaving care support initiative provides culturally appropriate support for

Aboriginal young people aged 16 to 21 years who are transitioning from out-of-home care, including kinship care.

Aboriginal young people can access the leaving care program through ACCOs to support their transition to independent living. Aboriginal young people should have a cultural support plan that identifies their support needs when leaving care.

#### Keeping in contact

Keeping in touch may be a good idea for you, your family and the young person. Discuss this with the young person and their care team. The agreed arrangements will be included in the young person's Care and Transition Plan.

#### Useful resources

- ▶ The Department of Health and Human Services website provides a list of services that can help the young person with issues such as housing or education <a href="https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/leaving-care">https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/leaving-care</a>
- ▶ **CREATE** is the national body creating a better life for children and young people in the care system. Call 1800 655 105 or visit <a href="https://www.create.org.au">www.create.org.au</a>
- ▶ Information about **applying for records** on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/applying-records">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/applying-records</a>
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health <a href="http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ap.12299/full">http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ap.12299/full</a>
- ➤ Transition to Independent Living Allowance for information about the allowance and the application process at the Australian Government Department of Social Services <a href="https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/benefits-payments/transition-to-independent-living-allowance-tila">https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/benefits-payments/transition-to-independent-living-allowance-tila</a>
- ▶ VicRoads L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program <a href="https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/your-ps/get-your-ps/preparing-for-your-licence-test/l2p-learner-driver-mentor-program">https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/your-ps/get-your-ps/preparing-for-your-licence-test/l2p-learner-driver-mentor-program</a>



# 15. Child protection, the Children's Court and the Family Court

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# 15. Child protection, the Children's Court and the Family Court

#### The role of child protection

Under the Act, child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency provides services to protect children and young people from significant harm.

Child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency will take all reasonable steps to enable the child or young person to stay at home with their own family, where it is safe to do so. However, some children and young people are placed in out-of-home care for their own safety.

When a child needs an out-of-home care placement, it is a legislative requirement that kinship care be investigated before other out-of-home care placement options are pursued.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle requires that preference be given to Aboriginal extended family or relatives, or where this is not possible, other extended family or relatives are the next preferred care option for an Aboriginal child or young person.

#### The role of the Children's Court

In Victoria, the Family Division of the Children's Court decides whether a child or young person is in need of protection, and makes the appropriate protection order. Court proceedings are almost always initiated by child protection.

In some circumstances, a child or young person may be placed in care by a bail justice. A bail justice hearing occurs when a child or young person is taken into emergency care and the court will not be sitting within 24 hours. The emergency care application is then heard in the Children's Court on the next working day.

The Family Court of Australia is separate from the Children's Court and administers Australia's family law. A protection order takes priority over a Family Court order.

#### **Protection orders**

The child or young person in your care may be on one of the orders in Table 4, made by the Children's Court for the protection and care of children and young people. As a carer, you can expect to know what has been decided by the Court. Speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager about this.

Table 4. Types of protection orders

Interim accommodation order	This order is made when the magistrate at the Children's Court believes there are issues to be resolved about a child or young person's safety and wellbeing. The order specifies where they will live until the next court date.
Family preservation order	The Court will make a family preservation order when it has decided that a child or young person is in need of protection, and can safely stay in parental care while the protective concerns are being addressed. The child or young person will live with one or both parents, with no change to parental responsibility for them. The department will supervise them.
Family reunification order	The Court has decided that a child or young person is in need of protection and cannot safely stay in their parents' care while the protective concerns are being addressed.
	The family reunification order grants parental responsibility for the child or young person to the Secretary of the department or Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency, but a parent's agreement must be sought for any decisions about major long-term issues. This order will usually include conditions.
Care by Secretary order	The Court has decided that family reunification will not be achieved in a timely way for the child or young person, or the child or young person has been in out-of-home care for more than 24 months and cannot safely return to their parents' care.
	This order is made for a period of two years and the Secretary of the department or Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency has parental responsibility for the child or young person, to the exclusion of all others. This order does not include conditions.
Long-term care order	The Court has decided that the child or young person is in need of long-term care and there is a suitable carer available to raise the child or young person. Under this order, the Secretary of the department or Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency has parental responsibility for the child or young person, to the exclusion of all others, until the child or young person turns 18 or marries, whichever happens first.

#### Table 4. Types of protection orders (continued)

### Permanent care order

The Court has found proposed permanent carers suitable to have parental responsibility for the child or young person, to the exclusion of all others, until the child or young person turns 18 or marries, whichever happens first.

Apart from the care allowance, once this order is issued, the department has no further role with the child or young person or carers. The order must include a condition that a person caring for a child or young person must, in the best interests of the child or young person, preserve their identity and connection to their culture of origin, and their relationships with their birth parents and family, unless the Court decides otherwise.

### Undertaking – protection order

The Court has decided that a child or young person is in need of protection and that future risks can be sufficiently managed by the parent and child or young person with community support. The undertaking may include conditions. The department does not stay involved when an undertaking is made.

An undertaking may require the child or young person, their parent(s) or the person with whom the child or young person is living, to undertake in writing to do, or refrain from doing, actions specified in the undertaking. An undertaking can only be made if the person entering into the undertaking consents to the order.

# Attending Children's Court hearings

The court process can be a complex and stressful time for children and young people, but it can also be daunting for you and the child or young person's parents.

#### Attendance by kinship carers

Making a decision as the carer to attend court can be complicated, and may not be in the best interests of you or the child or young person.

You will need to consider this carefully, and discuss your decision with child protection or your agency.

#### Party to proceedings

It is not generally necessary for kinship carers to become parties to proceedings. For example, where the department's recommendation to the Children's Court is consistent with the views of the kinship carer, it would not usually be necessary for them to be joined as parties to proceedings.

Other factors to consider may include:

- that by joining the proceedings, kinship carers would be expected to fully participate in the proceedings, which may mean significant time and financial commitment, such as the requirement to attend multiple hearings
- the impact on the relationship between the kinship carer and other family members, if the kinship carer joins the proceedings and advocates for a position that is contrary to the views of the parents, the child or young person, or other family members.

You are not automatically a party to proceedings. However, if you want to be joined as a party, you will need to satisfy the Children's Court that you have a 'direct interest in the proceeding' and that it is practicable for you to be joined.

If you want to apply to be joined to the proceeding, you need to inform registry staff on the morning of the court case, notify the department of your application and make an oral application to the magistrate in open court. All parties to the case will be asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with your application. If the magistrate grants your application, you will be given time to seek legal representation if you wish.

#### Attendance by the child or young person

All children and young people should be given the opportunity to decide whether or not to attend court. They are not required to attend unless they:

- wish to do so
- are ordered by the Court to attend.

All children and young people aged 10 years or older will be legally represented in proceedings in the Family Division of the Children's Court, except where the Court determines that the child or young person is developmentally not able to provide instructions. A child under 10 years, or a child over 10 years or more whom the Court has determined is not able to give instructions, may be legally represented, if the Court determines it is in the best interests of the child or young person.

If the child or young person decides not to attend court, they must still provide their instructions to a legal representative, and this is arranged away from the Court by their child protection worker or agency case manager. Phone instructions may be provided with the prior agreement of the child or young person's legal representative.

Aboriginal children and young people may be represented by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service or the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service.

If the child and young person is required or chooses to attend the Court, they may see their parents, siblings or other family members. If this is a concern for them, discuss this with child protection or your agency, so that plans can be made to support them. If a child or young person does decide to go to court, or is required to attend, child protection or the agency will arrange to transport them.

### Preparing a child or young person attending court

To help children and young people who want to attend court, find out some details, such as:

- who will be at court family members, lawyers and court staff
- what everyone's role is in court the magistrate, the clerk and lawyers
- what the department is recommending about their care and why
- what will be expected of them
- how long the process will take.

## Supporting the child or young person when they attend court

A child or young person in your care may need a lot of support from you if they have to attend court. While at court, they may hear discussions about why they are not living with their parents or other family members. This could be upsetting to them and they may need extra emotional support following court. You should also prepare the child or young person for the possibility that their parents may not attend court.

If a child or young person is required or wishes to attend court, there are strategies you can use to help them lessen feelings of being stressed, pressured, confused or bored. For example, take quiet activities to court, such as colouring or reading, and some snacks and drinks, as there can be lengthy waiting times. Talk to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you think the child or young person is feeling stressed or pressured.

The child protection worker or agency case manager will advise you and the child or young person of the outcome of the proceedings. You may find that the child or young person does not fully understand the outcome and have more questions. If you find this is the case, please raise any questions with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

#### **Children's Court processes**

At court, legal representatives for child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency, the child or young person, and the parents of the child or young person will advocate on behalf of their client and present their client's views about the child or young person's ongoing care. The magistrate makes a decision based on the information presented.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will prepare a detailed report for the Court that outlines their assessment of the family situation, their recommendations about care for the child or young person, and the type of protection order they think is best for them. Also submitted to the Court at this time is the child or young person's case plan, which covers significant decisions about the child or young person. Case plans are covered in more detail in *Chapter 5* and also in *Information sheet 5*. Case planning, case management, roles and responsibilities.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency base their report and case plan on information gathered from many sources,

including you as the primary carer. You are in the unique position to gain insight into the needs of the child or young person in your care. You can present your views during care team meetings, or you can advise child protection or your agency about your views.

Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency cannot give a copy of the court report to you, an agency or other service, including the police, without consent of the child or young person, or their parents. This means copies of the court reports are not automatically provided to you.

## When asked for a child or young person's protection order

You may be asked by childcare, schools or other professionals for a copy of the child or young person's protection order. Let them know they can ask for that directly from child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency, or you could ask the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager to provide this information.

# Voluntary involvement with child protection

Kinship care placements instigated by child protection may or may not involve an order made through the Children's Court.

Where there is no order in place and a child protection intervention has occurred, the carer has been assessed and approved, and the placement has been endorsed by child protection. An order may not be required if the

parents consent to the placement, but where there would be significant concerns for the child or young person if they were to return to their care. In this circumstance, child protection have assessed that the kinship placement is required.

#### **The Family Court**

The Family Court hears matters under the Family Law Act 1975. In Victoria, there are Family Courts located in Melbourne and Dandenong, and circuit Court sittings are held periodically in major country centres. The Family Court can make orders in relation to parental responsibility, with whom a child or young person should live, or spend time and communicate with, and the financial support of a child or young person.

The Family Court also has jurisdiction to make orders relating to the welfare of children. In deciding whether to make an order relating to the welfare of a child, the Court must regard the best interests of the child or young person as the paramount consideration.

#### Family Court orders and agreements

#### Parenting order

A parenting order is a set of orders made by the Court about parenting arrangements for a child or young person. Kinship carers can apply for parenting orders. A court can make a parenting order based on an agreement between the parties or after a court hearing or trial. When a parenting order is made, each person affected by the order must follow it.

#### **Agreements**

If you reach an agreement with the parents, then you can make a parenting plan or file consent orders through the Family Court.

A parenting plan records arrangements that you and the parents agree to, and often these are made with the help of a family mediator.

A parenting plan is not a legally enforceable agreement. It is different from a parenting order, which is made by the Court. Contact your nearest Family Relationship Centre for more information.

A **consent order** is a written agreement that is approved by the Court, so it becomes an enforceable court order. You will usually need to seek legal assistance to do this, as consent orders are often used when there are court proceedings occurring in relation to a child or young person.

If the parents do not want a written agreement or you cannot reach agreement about certain issues, you can obtain legal advice about your options, which may include initiating court proceedings for a parenting order. If you want a legally enforceable agreement, you will need to get legal advice or contact a Family Relationship Centre in your area. For more information, contact the Family Relationship Advice Line. Call 1800 050 321 or visit <a href="http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/">http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/</a> Services/FRAL/Pages/default.aspx>.

Court cases can be emotionally and financially draining, so careful thought that is guided by sound legal advice is strongly recommended.

Remember to ask for an estimate of costs, and consider how and when payment will be made.

#### Complying with orders

Orders made through the Family Court will usually include orders about who the child or young person will have regular contact with and how often, unless it is considered not to be in their best interests. As a carer, you are required to adhere to the orders and assist the child or young person to do so, even if this is difficult.

If you have ongoing concerns or problems with the arrangements that cannot be resolved, you should seek legal advice. If you have serious and immediate concerns about the safety of the child, you should contact the police or child protection.

#### **Child protection and Family Court orders**

If there are Family Court orders in place and child protection receive a report that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm, they will investigate these concerns. If the child is in need of protection, a Children's Court order will take precedence over an order of the Family Court.

# Getting legal support and advice

You may wish to seek legal advice to help you understand your legal rights and responsibilities, and explain how the law applies to your case.

Legal advice is available from:

- legal aid
- a community legal centre
- a private law firm.

For further information about options available to you, visit the **Department of Justice and Regulation** website at <a href="http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/">http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/</a>.

The Court Network provides support, information and referral to persons attending court. You can contact the **Court Network Telephone Information and Referral Service** by calling 1800 681 614 or visit <a href="http://www.courtnetwork.com.au/">http://www.courtnetwork.com.au/</a>.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Children's Court call (03) 8638 3300 or visit <a href="http://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/">http://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/</a>
- Country Courts where Children's Court matters are heard <a href="www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us/court-locations/country-courts">www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us/court-locations/country-courts</a>
- ▶ Legal representation for children and young people see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/court/preparation-court/legal-representation-children">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/court/preparation-court/legal-representation-children</a>
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service <a href="http://vals.org.au/about/">http://vals.org.au/about/</a>
- Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria call 1800 105 303 or visit <a href="http://www.fvpls.org/">http://www.fvpls.org/</a>
- Metropolitan Courts for locations of Children's Court matters <a href="http://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us/court-locations/metropolitan-courts">http://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/about-us/court-locations/metropolitan-courts</a>
- Relationships between family law and child protection see the Australian Law Reform Commission <www.alrc.gov.au> and go to the Publications section to access The intersection of child protection and family laws
- **Family Court of Australia <a href="http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/home">http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/home>**
- Family Relationship Advice Line call 1800 050 321 or visit < http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRAL/Pages/default.aspx>

# 16. Responding to critical incidents

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### 16. Responding to critical incidents

#### **Crisis support**

Child protection or your agency will provide you with crisis support when you have been challenged by a child or young person's behaviour, or you find yourself in an emergency situation.

If you need urgent support during business hours (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm), contact the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, or ask to speak to the duty worker or manager if the case manager is not available.

For crisis support out of hours, contact the child protection after-hours emergency service or your agency (if involved), via their on-call or out-of-hours contact number.

#### **Important contacts**

#### Child Protection After Hours Emergency Service, call 13 12 78

This is an emergency service from 5 pm to 8.45 am, Monday to Friday, including 24 hours a day on weekends and public holidays. This service has responsibility for children or young people in need of a child protection service response after hours, where a child and young person is in a situation that cannot safely be left until the next working day.

#### Kids Helpline, call 1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline is Australia's free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week phone and online counselling service for young people aged five to 25 years. Visit **Kids Helpline** for more information at <a href="https://kidshelpline.com.au/">https://kidshelpline.com.au/</a>>.

#### Lifeline, call 13 11 14

Lifeline is a confidential telephone crisis support service that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from a landline, payphone or mobile. Anyone across Australia experiencing personal crisis or thinking about suicide can contact Lifeline. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, trained volunteers are ready to listen, provide support and give referrals.

#### Maternal and Child Health Line, call 13 22 29

This is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week, statewide telephone service that supports the maternal and child health service, and is available to Victorian families with children from birth to school age.

#### NURSE-ON-CALL, call 1300 60 60 24

NURSE-ON-CALL is a phone service that provides immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The cost is a local call from anywhere in Victoria (calls from mobile phones may be

charged at a higher rate). For more information, visit **NURSE-ON-CALL** at <www2.health.vic.gov. au/primary-and-community-health/primary-care/nurse-on-call>.

## Police/Fire/Ambulance, call 000 or go to an emergency department at a hospital.

#### Suicide call back service, call 1300 659 467

Suicide call back service provides free phone, video and online counselling for anyone affected by suicide. This service is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by a team of professional counsellors, social workers and psychologists.

### Victorian Poisons Information Centre, call 13 11 26

The poisons centre provides advice about what to do if a person has been poisoned, overdosed, made a mistake with medication dosage, been exposed to a toxic substance, or been bitten or stung by a venomous animal or insect.

# What to do during a critical incident

When a serious incident occurs that involves a child or young person in your care, contact child protection or your agency **as soon as possible**. This will ensure that you receive the support you need after the incident, and it will also help child protection or the agency to follow required procedures.

#### What is a critical incident?

Critical incidents include:

- when the child or young person is absent or missing
- behaviours that are dangerous, disruptive, sexual or sexually exploitative
- a breach of privacy or confidentiality
- a community concern involving a child or young person
- the death of a person that impacts the child or young person
- drug or alcohol misuse
- an unforeseen illness
- actions or behaviours that have caused injury that requires medical attention
- deterioration in a known medical condition
- medication errors or refusal of prescribed medication
- physical assault
- poor quality of care
- possession of illegal or unauthorised goods
- property damage or disruption
- self-harm
- a suicide attempt
- sexual assault.

#### Missing persons reports

The whereabouts of a child or young person in out-of-home care should be known at all times. If their whereabouts is unknown, you must advise child protection or your agency as soon as possible, to discuss whether a missing persons report is to be lodged, and to decide who is going to lodge the report with police.

The police will want to know where you have looked for the child or young person, and who you have contacted in search of them.

If you make a missing persons report, you need to:

- go to the local police station to fill out the report, providing a description of the child or young person, what they were wearing, their weight, height, eye and hair colour. It is helpful if you have a recent photo
- provide police with your contact name and phone number, as well as an afterhours contact
- ask police to inform child protection when the child or young person is located
- advise police of child protection's proposed plan and care arrangement for the child or young person when found.

For more information, see the **missing persons advice** in the Child Protection Manual at <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/critical-incidents/missing-persons-report">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/critical-incidents/missing-persons-report</a>.

# Sexual abuse and sexual assault

It is an offence for any adult to fail to disclose child sexual abuse to the police. The offence requires that any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (aged under 16) disclose that information to police. The offence applies to all adults, not just professionals who work with children, unless they have a reasonable excuse.

A child or young person is sexually abused when any person uses their power over the child or young person to involve them in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity.

#### It may include:

- fondling of the child or young person's genitals (or getting the child or young person to fondle the perpetrator's genitals)
- masturbation (with the child or young person as either observer or participant)
- oral sex
- vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger, or any other object
- fondling of breasts
- voyeurism (regular observation of the child or young person)
- exhibitionism.

It can also include exposing the child or young person to pornography, or using them for the purposes of pornography or sexual exploitation.

Children and young people can lack the necessary information and maturity to make an informed decision about sexual activities with an older person. They do not have adult knowledge of sex and sexual relationships, or the social meaning of sexuality and its potential consequences.

Sexual assault happens when someone of any age does not consent to a sexual act or acts. In some cases, such as offences against children and young people, consent is not accepted. It happens more frequently than people realise, and it is a crime that can happen at any time throughout a person's lifespan.

#### Sexual exploitation

Children and young people in out-of-home care and those leaving care are at higher risk of being sexually exploited.

Sexual exploitation is when '...children and young people under 18 are being involved in exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where the young person (or third person or persons) receives 'something' (such as food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities'.<sup>4</sup>

The factors that increase a child or young person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and grooming are similar to the reasons why a child or young person may not be able to reside with their parents or other family members.

They include:

- exposure to family violence
- parental drug and alcohol use
- parental mental health issues
- poor attachment.

Acts of sexual exploitation (such as sexting), grooming for the purposes of sexual exploitation, or contact between a child or young person and the person sexually exploiting them, can both occur using technology. Sexting between a 14 year old

in a 'relationship' with a 27 year old or the exchange of child exploitation material (illicit images) between a 14 year old and an adult are examples of sexual exploitation.

Supervising or discussing cyber safety is therefore an important part of reducing the risk of sexual exploitation. See the section on cyber safety in *Chapter 4*.

Understanding and managing these risks can be challenging for carers, child protection, agencies and police.

#### Grooming

It is common for a person who intends to sexually exploit a child or young person to try to build rapport with them, to reduce their resistance to sexual exploitation. This is known as 'grooming behaviour' and, while difficult to isolate, it is important that you understand this behaviour pattern.

A grooming offence is in effect to target individuals who communicate with a child or young person or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse.

#### **Grooming behaviour**

Grooming behaviour may include:

- inappropriate 'accidental' touching
- giving gifts or attention for inappropriate purposes

<sup>4.</sup> Paskell C 2012, *Tackling child exploitation: helping local authorities to develop local responses*, Barnardos, UK.

- exposing the child or young person to pornography or sexual acts (either openly or 'accidentally')
- talking about sex inappropriately in front of a child or young person
- manipulating a child or young person through threats or the misuse of authority.

#### Sexual assault services

Sexual assault services provide direct support for children and young people, who are recent or past victims or survivors of sexual assault. Children and young people in out-of-home care can often be resistant to accessing these services, so they may need to be offered a number of times.

#### Services include:

- crisis care for adults
- paediatric forensic medical services for children and young people
- counselling, advocacy and support
- specialist consultation.

For advice on what to do if a child or young person discloses a sexual assault to you, see *Information sheet 3. Responding to a disclosure of abuse.* 

#### Counselling, advocacy and support

Sexual assault support services for adults, children and young people include counselling services that range from counselling following a crisis, to longer-term therapeutic treatment, casework, advocacy, information, practical assistance and group work.

Counselling services for children and young people who have been sexually abused include the Gatehouse Centre at The Royal Children's Hospital, South East Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) at the Monash Medical Centre, and therapeutic services available through the Children's Protection Society. Other CASA locations also provide services to children and young people.

# Responding to a disclosure of sexual abuse

If a child or young person has been sexually abused, they are more likely to disclose this when they start feeling safe. It is important to think about the possibility of a disclosure and how you would respond, before such a situation arises. See *Information sheet 3: Responding to a disclosure of abuse*.

#### **Useful resources**

- Child sexual abuse information for professionals see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/information-sheets/child-sexual-abuse-information/child-sexual-abuse-0">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/information-sheets/child-sexual-abuse-information/child-sexual-abuse-0</a>
- Criminal offences to improve responses to child sexual abuse see the Department of Health and Human Services website
  <a href="https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/criminal-offences-improve-responses-child-sex-abuse">https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/criminal-offences-improve-responses-child-sex-abuse</a>
- ► Children's Protection Society therapeutic services <a href="http://www.cps.org.au/access-our-services/therapeutic-services/">http://www.cps.org.au/access-our-services/therapeutic-services/</a>
- Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault <a href="http://www.casa.org.au/">http://www.casa.org.au/</a>
- ▶ **Sexual assault services** see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/</a> advice-and-protocols/service-descriptions/support-services/sexual-assault-services-including>
- Sexual exploitation see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/high-risk/sexual-exploitation/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/high-risk/sexual-exploitation/</a>
- Victoria Police and sexual assault advice <a href="https://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document\_ID=43353">www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document\_ID=43353</a>
- Information about the **Client Incident Management System (CIMS)** on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cims">https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cims</a>
- Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme on the Commission for Children and Young People website <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/</a>

# 17. Reportable conduct scheme

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### 17. Reportable conduct scheme

The Reportable Conduct Scheme (the scheme) was introduced in July 2017 to improve oversight of how organisations that exercise care, supervision and authority over children and young people, prevent, investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse and neglect made against the organisation's employees.

The purpose of the scheme is to help identify individuals who pose a risk to children, but who do not have criminal records, and facilitate the exclusion of those individuals from working with children in the future.

The benefits of a reportable conduct scheme include:

- identifying individuals who pose a risk to children, but do not have criminal records, and enabling them to be excluded from working with children and young people
- independent oversight of responses to allegations of child abuse and misconduct involving children and young people, against workers and volunteers in organisations
- building the capacity of organisations to respond appropriately and effectively to allegations of child abuse and misconduct involving children and young people.

#### Kinship carers and the scheme

If reportable allegations are made to the department about a kinship carer, the law requires an investigation of the alleged conduct of concern and to take appropriate action, if required.

Any party, including children and young people, family members or members of the public, can make a reportable allegation about a department employee or a kinship carer, either directly to the department, or to the Commission for Children and Young People.

#### Reportable conduct

There is an allegation of reportable conduct where a person has a 'reasonable belief' that there has been:

- a sexual offence (even prior to criminal proceedings commencing), sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with, or in the presence of a child or young person
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm
- significant neglect of a child or young person
- 'misconduct' involving any of the above.

An allegation of reportable conduct means any information that leads a person to form a 'reasonable belief' that an employee (including a kinship carer) has committed reportable conduct or 'misconduct that may involve reportable conduct'. This includes information about something that is alleged to have occurred concerning the child or young person in care, as well as misconduct involving children or young people who may not be clients of the department.

The scope of 'reportable conduct' is wide and is not limited to conduct that may be criminal.

The reportable conduct scheme operates in conjunction with existing critical incident reporting. See *Chapter 16* and *Chapter 19*.

# The role of the Commission for Children and Young People

Under the scheme, the Commission for Children and Young People has the power to:

- receive allegations and findings of reportable conduct
- assess an organisation's systems to prevent, notify and investigate reportable conduct
- provide oversight of workplace investigations
- investigate allegations in some circumstances
- refer findings to professional registration bodies and the Working with Children Check Unit
- build the capacity of organisations to respond to allegations of abuse
- report to Parliament on performance of the scheme and trends.

The scheme does not replace or interfere with police investigations. The Commission works with Victoria Police to make sure allegations of criminal conduct are dealt with appropriately.

# The process for a reportable conduct allegation

It can be unsettling and very stressful when allegations are raised about the care you are providing to a child or young person. Carers can expect that they will be afforded procedural fairness in response to any allegation.

Procedural fairness means that:

- the kinship carer will be informed about the allegation that has been raised
- the kinship carer will be entitled to have an independent support person at any meeting if they wish
- the kinship carer will be provided with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the concerns raised
- the persons involved in an investigation will make reasonable inquiries or investigations before making a decision, and will conduct the investigation without undue delay.

When receiving a reportable conduct allegation, child protection and the agency, if involved, will consider and determine the most appropriate course of action to be taken, and any immediate risk of harm to the child or young person. This assessment will determine what actions are in the best interests of the child or young person, taking account of natural justice and procedural fairness for carers.



#### Advocacy, support and information

Kinship carers may wish to seek independent advice and support if an allegation of reportable conduct concerning them is made.

For further information on the scheme, visit the Commission for Children and Young People website at <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/</a>>.

#### Kinship Carers Victoria

Kinship Carers Victoria is the peak body for kinship carers in Victoria, providing independent and confidential advice and support, including how to manage issues or complaints. To receive advice, support or advocacy from Kinship Carers Victoria, call (03) 9372 2422 or email <a href="mailto:kinship"><director@grandparents.com.au></a>.



# 18. Feedback, complaints and compliments

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# 18. Feedback, complaints and compliments

# Feedback, complaints and compliments explained

You have the right to provide feedback, make a complaint or give a compliment about a decision or a situation relating to the care of a child or young person. You can expect that your views and opinions will be taken into consideration and responded to in a way that is:

- transparent
- fair
- accountable
- outcome focused
- respectful.

It is important that you feel confident sharing your concerns with child protection or your agency at any time. This is the best way to prevent issues from becoming a bigger problem or a formal complaint.

#### **Feedback**

Issues arise from time to time that may need urgent or immediate action. These can usually be resolved quickly.

Quick and effective resolution is important to:

- enable you, the department or your agency to focus on caring for the child or young person in your care
- minimise any disruption for the child or young person

- ensure your needs are met, and you receive the appropriate and expected level of support and assistance to perform your role
- prevent the issue from escalating.

#### Compliments

Compliments are expressions of praise, encouragement or gratitude about services provided or managed by your agency, child protection or the department. They provide valuable feedback about the level of satisfaction with service delivery.

Compliments should be acknowledged and the person providing the compliment thanked for their feedback. Where possible, the person providing the compliment will be informed how their feedback will be used, and provided with assurance that it will be passed on to relevant staff members

#### **Complaints**

In the department's Complaints and Compliments Management Policy, a complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with any service provided, contracted, funded or regulated by the department. A complaint may also be made about the complaint-handling process of the department.

# How to raise feedback, provide a compliment or make a complaint

A compliment can be provided directly to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, their line manager or alternatively the department.

The following steps will help you to provide feedback or make a complaint.

## Step 1. Discuss your concerns with the child protection worker

Contact the child or young person's child protection worker to discuss your concerns and to resolve day-to-day issues that require urgent or immediate action. You should do this first before other processes.

If you cannot resolve the issue with the child protection worker, or you are uncomfortable having a discussion with them, contact their manager to try to achieve a resolution.

## Step 2. Register a complaint with the Department of Health and Human Services

If you are unhappy with how your complaint has been managed by the department, or the issue relates to an action or service provided by the department that cannot be resolved through Step 1, you can submit a complaint to the department's Complaints and Privacy Unit.

To do this, call 1300 884 706, email <complaints.reception@dhhs.vic.gov.au>, complete an online complaint form at <a href="https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint">https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint</a> or write to:

Complaints and Privacy Unit GPO Box 4057 Melbourne VIC 3001

Alternatively, if you know your department divisional office, you can contact the Performance, Quality and Compliance Team in the department by sending an email to:

- <north.feedback@dhhs.vic.gov.au>
- <south.feedback@dhhs.vic.gov.au>
- <east.feedback@dhhs.vic.gov.au>
- <west.feedback@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

Complaints received by the department are managed in accordance with the department's Compliments and complaints management policy, which provides important information about how your complaint will be managed, the review and response timeframes, and how your complaint will inform improvements in service delivery. To view this **policy**, visit <a href="https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint">https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint</a>>.

## Step 3. Register a complaint with the Victorian Ombudsman

The Victorian Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Victorian Parliament who investigates complaints about administrative actions taken by Victorian Government agencies and departments.

If you have a complaint about a Victorian Government agency or department, the Victorian Ombudsman may be able to assist you. Before contacting the Victorian Ombudsman, you should attempt to resolve your complaint with the department and your agency if applicable.

To contact the Victorian Ombudsman, call (03) 9613 6222 or 1800 806 314 toll free (regional areas only), complete an online complaint form at <a href="https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/">https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/</a> Complaints> or write to:

Victorian Ombudsman Level 2 570 Bourke Street Melbourne VIC 3000.

#### Register a complaint with your agency

If the child or young person is supported by an agency and your issue is with a service they provide, contact their agency case manager to discuss your concerns. If you cannot resolve the issue with the agency case manager or you are uncomfortable having a discussion with them, contact their line manager to try to resolve the concerns.

If your issue remains unresolved or you are unhappy about a service provided by the agency case manager or their line manager, you can register a complaint with your agency by following their complaints process.

On request, your agency can provide you with a copy of its complaints policy.

If the child or young person is supported by an agency, but the issue is with the department, the agency can raise the issue with the department if required. In most instances, issues will be resolved with your agency without the need for further escalation, including issues that need urgent or immediate action.

If you are not satisfied with the response from the agency, contact the department as outlined in Step 2.

## Requesting a review of case planning decisions by child protection

The review process applies to all decisions made by child protection as part of the decision-making process for children and young people involved with child protection, including case planning decisions. This does not apply to decisions of a Court, such as court-ordered access arrangements, which must be appealed to a higher Court.

A parent, a child or young person, or a person directly affected by a child protection decision, who has a significant relationship with the child or young person, may request access to the internal departmental review process. This can include carers, in some instances, and may involve a review of decisions around care arrangements, contact arrangements, and involvement of other agencies and services with the child or young person.

To request a review of a case planning decision by child protection, you should speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager or their manager. See the **internal review of decisions** advice in the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/case-planning/internal-review-decisions">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/case-planning/internal-review-decisions</a>.

For Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care, kinship carers should discuss the case planning review process with the authorised Aboriginal agency.

#### Advocacy, support and information

#### **Kinship Carers Victoria**

Kinship Carers Victoria is the peak body for kinship carers in Victoria, providing independent and confidential advice and support, including how to manage issues or complaints. To receive advice, support or advocacy from Kinship Carers Victoria, call (03) 9372 2422 or email *director@grandparents.com.au>*.

## The Commission for Children and Young People

The Commission for Children and Young People is not an official complaints or review body. However, they can provide information and assistance to people concerned about the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

To contact the Commission for Children and Young People, call 1300 78 29 78 (enquiry line), Monday to Friday, 10 am to 4 pm.

#### Useful resources

- ▶ Feedback and complaints to the Department of Health and Human Services. Call 1300 884 706 or visit <a href="https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint">https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint</a>>
- Kinship Carers Victoria <a href="http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/">http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/</a>

## 19. Client Incident Management System

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# 19. Client Incident Management System

#### Introduction

Victoria's kinship carers provide a very high standard of care to the children and young people in their care. However, at times, concerns may be raised about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person in a kinship care arrangement.

Concerns can be raised by any person, including the child or young person, and may relate to you, members of your household or family, or people within your wider social network, who come into contact with the child or young person in their kinship placement.

Concerns and allegations are considered in context of a child or young person's age, stage of life, culture and gender. In some instances, the child or young person will be moved from their current care arrangement to ensure their immediate safety while the concerns or allegations are fully assessed.

It can be an unsettling and stressful experience when concerns are raised about the care you are providing to a child or young person.

#### Client Incident Management System

In early 2018, the Client Incident Management System (CIMS) will replace (supersede) the Guidelines to responding to quality of care concerns in out-of-home care. Until the CIMS is implemented, the processes and procedures outlined in the Guidelines will remain in place.

The CIMS is a consistent approach to incident management, focusing on the safety and wellbeing of clients, including children and young people in out-of-home care, and supports positive experiences and outcomes.

If a concern or allegation has been raised about the care you are providing, the CIMS process will be led by child protection, or the agency if the case is contracted.

The CIMS comprises five stages, which are:

- 1. Identification and response identification is when the incident, concern or allegation is disclosed to, or observed by, a service provider, which includes the agency or child protection. This may be a disclosure by the child or young person, another family member or a professional. The response is the immediate activities undertaken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.
- 2. Reporting captures specific information about the incident. In this stage, follow up will occur to ensure the information about the incident is accurate, and the department and the agency (if involved) are satisfied that appropriate actions are being planned or undertaken to manage the incident.

3. Incident investigation – this is to determine whether there has been abuse or neglect of the child or young person. An investigation is a formal process of collecting information to determine the facts, which in some circumstances may inform subsequent criminal proceedings.

All allegations of abuse or poor quality of care must be screened for investigation. Incident investigations may be undertaken by child protection or the agency, if the case is contracted.

4. Incident review – this is an analysis of the incident to identify what happened, whether it was managed appropriately, identify likely causes of the incident and any learnings to apply in the future to reduce the risk of future harm.

Reviews may be undertaken by child protection or the agency, if the case is contracted.

5. Analysis and learning – this enables agencies or the department to review and assess the way in which an incident has been managed, to implement improvements, minimise risk and to support a continuous improvement

approach. This in turn enhances the experience and outcomes of those involved in the CIMS process.

#### Support and assistance

If a concern is raised about the care you have provided, it is the role of child protection or your agency to support you during and after the CIMS processes, including:

- allocating a liaison person
- providing advice about procedures and timeframes
- keeping you up to date with the progress of the investigation
- providing information about the services available to you
- providing access to appropriate support services
- making a referral for counselling, if you feel this would be beneficial for you or your family
- informing you about how to seek a review, resolve disputes or make a complaint.

If you feel you need further assistance, consider contacting Kinship Carers Victoria on (03) 9372 2422.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ For more information about **CIMS**, visit the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cims">http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/cims</a>>
- Kinship Carers Victoria for support and information, call (03) 9372 2422 or visit
   <a href="http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/">http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/</a>

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### 20. Glossary and acronyms

#### Glossary

The following terms are commonly used by child protection workers, agency case managers and the Children's Court, and are consistent with the glossary from the department's Child Protection Manual.

For definitions of protection orders, see Chapter 15. Child protection, Children's Court and the Family Court.

## Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program

This program enables the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, under section 18 of the Children Youth and Families Act (the Act), to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified functions and exercise specified powers conferred on the Secretary, in relation to a protection order in respect of an Aboriginal child or young person.

## Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation

An Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) is a non-government organisation that has a board of local Aboriginal community members who are elected by the local community. The board provides direction and leadership that ensures service provision meets the needs of the Aboriginal community.

#### **Aboriginal Child Placement Principle**

This principle is a nationally agreed standard in determining placement of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. It aims to enhance and preserve Aboriginal children and young people's cultural identity by ensuring that they maintain strong connections with family, community and culture. The principle governs the practice of child protection practitioners and community services when placing Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. The principle is enshrined in the Act.

#### Aboriginal family-led decision making

Aboriginal family-led decision-making (AFLDM) is a culturally based approach to decision making and planning with Aboriginal families about the safety needs of their children and young people, and how these can be met.

Referrals to the program from child protection are considered once abuse or neglect of an Aboriginal child is substantiated. The AFLDM conveners – one from child protection and one

from the Aboriginal community – meet with the family and relevant community members to make decisions about how to respond to protective concerns and keep the child or young person safe in the future.

The model utilises traditional Aboriginal approaches to solving family problems, and involves Aboriginal elders, the child or young person, and extended family. Consideration is to be given to AFLDM, in relation to best-interests planning and placement planning.

#### Aboriginal kinship care

Aboriginal kinship care is care provided by relatives or friends to an Aboriginal child or young person who cannot live with their parents, where Aboriginal family and community, and Aboriginal culture are valued as central to the child or young person's safety, stability and development.

#### **Access**

Access, also known as contact, is contact of a child or young person in out-of-home care with a person significant to that child or young person, by way of a visit or other communication.

#### Agency

An agency, often referred to as a community service organisation or Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), provides services to meet the needs of children, young people and families requiring care, support,

protection or accommodation, and for families requiring support. The provision of kinship care services are services that some agencies provide.

#### Agency case manager

An agency case manager is a worker from an agency funded by the Victorian Government, who is responsible for case management tasks for the child or young person.

#### **Agency worker**

An agency worker is a worker from an agency funded by the Victorian Government to provide kinship care services. An agency worker may provide kinship information and advice services, and kinship family services, or may assist with placement establishment support services.

#### **Authorised Aboriginal agency**

An Aboriginal agency is authorised under section 18 of the Act to implement the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program.

#### Care and Placement Plan

The purpose of a Care and Placement Plan is to ensure that all children and young people in out-of-home care have a clearly developed plan that addresses their needs, and ensures that all parties concerned with the care of the child or young person are clear about what they are expected to do to achieve the plan. The placement plan will always be guided by the case plan.

A Care and Placement Plan records the detailed day-to-day arrangements for the care of the child or young person. It also identifies how their long and short-term needs will be met.

#### Care and Transition Plan

The Care and Transition Plan replaces the Care and Placement Plan, once the young person turns 15 years. It covers their day-to-day care as they grow and mature through their adolescence. It also documents how to help the young person prepare for the future and make a successful transition to adulthood. It is developed by child protection or the agency at least six months prior to the young person transitioning from care, in consultation with the young person.

#### Care by Secretary order

See Chapter 15. Child protection, Children's Court and the Family Court.

#### Carer

A carer in this manual refers to a kinship carer caring for a child or young person who is subject to child protection intervention. A carer has primary day-to-day responsibility for a child or young person in home-based care, and aims to ensure their safety and wellbeing. A carer must be able to form a positive relationship with the child or young person that provides warmth, nurturing, support, stability and guidance.

A carer is an integral part of the care team. By definition, a carer is not the child or young person's parent. Child protection is responsible for assessing and approving kinship carers.

#### Care team

Every child and young person in out-of-home care should have a care team. The care teams exists to strengthen communication and collaboration between carers, department staff, community service organisation staff, other associated professionals, clients and their families, prompting all parties involved to consider the things any good parent would naturally consider when caring for their own children.

The care team develops the Care and Placement Plan, and contributes to the best-interests planning process. The composition of a care team will vary depending on the specific issues and needs of the child and family. However, it should always include the child or young person's case manager, carer and parents (as appropriate).

#### **Case contract**

A case contract is a formal written agreement between child protection and an agency for the provision of case management for an individual child protection client by the agency, or the provision of case management tasks on behalf of child protection.

#### Case management

Case management is the coordination and delivery of services that are provided as part of a child or young person's case plan.

#### Case manager

A case manager is the person who is allocated primary responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the child or young person's case plan. This can be either a child protection worker or an agency case manager. There are also times when case management is contracted to another department area, such as disability services.

Where case management is contracted, the agency case manager is responsible for the support and supervision of the child or young person in the kinship placement. They are also responsible for supporting the carer with the day-to-day care of the child or young person, and coordinating the care team.

The agency case manager is allocated as the child or young person's case manager, via a case contracting arrangement with child protection. At these times, the agency case manager is also responsible for the implementation of the child or young person's case plan.

#### Case plan

A case plan is prepared and endorsed by the case planner for a child or young person. The case plan sets out the permanency objective, and all significant decisions made by the

department or authorised Aboriginal agency, concerning the child or young person's present and future care and wellbeing, including care and contact arrangements.

The case plan includes decisions about health, education and other significant decisions, and is prepared for all children and young people where protective concerns have been substantiated – that is, where a case planner is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the child or young person is in need of protection. Implementation of the case plan is supported by the use of an actions table that sets out the goals and tasks required to address the protective concerns.

#### Case planner

A case planner is a person with delegation within child protection or an authorised Aboriginal agency to make case planning decisions. Case planners are usually the team managers or more senior child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency staff. Within child protection, practice leaders or above also have case planning delegation.

#### Child protection

The department has a statutory responsibility under the Act to provide child protection services for children and young people in Victoria under the age of 17 years and in need of protection or, when an order is in place, children and young people under the age of 18 years.

Child protection provides services to children, young people and their families that are aimed at protecting children and young people from significant harm. When a child or young person is assessed as being 'at risk' within the family, child protection will – in the first instance and in accordance with the law – take reasonable steps to enable the child or young person to remain in the care of their family, by strengthening the family's capacity to protect them.

When, even with support, there is an unacceptable risk of harm, child protection will intervene to bring the matter before the Children's Court and, if necessary, place the child or young person in emergency care. If the safe resumption of care by the parents cannot be achieved within the timeframes set out in the Act, child protection will work towards an alternative permanent family care arrangement, or an independent living arrangement, depending on the age and circumstances of the child or young person, or if there are exceptional circumstances.

#### Child protection worker

The child protection worker, also known as the child protection practitioner, is responsible for ensuring that the functions of child protection are undertaken for the child or young person. The child protection worker could be the allocated case manager, and is therefore responsible for the implementation of the case plan, or they could support the allocated case manager when this is contracted to an agency.

#### Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

The Act is Victorian legislation that governs the child and family services sector, and youth justice, and establishes the Children's Court.

#### Country (connection to or return to Country)

For Aboriginal people, returning to Country recognises the impact of disconnection on identity, health and wellbeing, and is about knowing and being connected to who you are, where you come from and what this means. It incorporates people, land, water, language, kinship systems, law, knowledge, values, beliefs and spirituality.

#### **Cultural plan**

A cultural plan is a requirement under the Act for an Aboriginal child or young person placed in out-of-home care. The cultural plan must address the cultural support needs of the child or young person. Section 10(3) of the Act focuses on promoting cultural and spiritual identity. The case plan should align with the cultural plan, and set out how the child or young person will maintain their identity and be connected to their Aboriginal community and Aboriginal culture.

#### Family reunification order

See Chapter 15. Child protection, Children's Court and the Family Court.

#### Family-led decision-making

Family-led decision-making (FLDM) is a process for making plans for a child or young person that involves meetings held with members of the family and extended family. FLDM (also referred to as family group conferencing) can happen when child protection has assessed that there is abuse or neglect, or where a child or young person is on a protection order from the Children's Court, or where a child is being relinquished. The purpose is to bring family members together so they can be supported to make decisions about the child or young person.

#### Home-based care

Home-based care provides care arrangements with approved carers in their own home, for children and young people up to 18 years of age, who have experienced significant abuse and neglect, and where the Court has made a decision that they are unable to safely live with their parents. Home-based care includes kinship care and foster care.

#### **Individual Education Plan**

Schools must develop an Individual Education Plan for every student in out-of-home care. The purpose of the Individual Education Plan is to describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the child or young person in out-of-home care.

#### Interim accommodation order

See Chapter 15. Child protection, Children's Court and the Family Court.

#### Kinship care

Kinship care is the care provided by relatives or a member of a child's social network when a child cannot live with their parents.

#### **Koori or Koorie**

Koori or Koorie is a term denoting an Aboriginal person from Victoria or southern New South Wales.

#### Long-term care order

See Chapter 15. Child protection and the Children's Court.

#### **Looking After Children Framework**

Looking After Children (LAC) is a practice framework for supporting outcomes-focused collaborative care for children and young people, who are placed away from their families as a result of child protection intervention. The framework was originally developed in the United Kingdom and has been implemented in many other places, internationally and interstate.

#### Permanency objective

The permanency objective is the plan for the ongoing care arrangement for a child or young person. A case plan must include one of the following permanency objectives, which are listed in order of preference:

 family preservation – the objective of ensuring a child or young person who is in the care of a parent remains in their care

- family reunification the objective of ensuring that a child or young person who has been removed from the care of their parent is returned to their care
- adoption the objective of placing the child or young person for adoption under the Adoption Act 1984
- permanent care the objective of arranging a permanent placement of the child or young person with a permanent carer or carers
- long-term out-of-home care the objective of placing the child or young person in:
  - a stable, long-term care arrangement with a specified carer or carers, or
  - another suitable long-term care arrangement.

#### Principal Officer of an Aboriginal agency

The Principal Officer is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO). In the same way that the Secretary of the department is responsible for the management of protection orders, once a child has been authorised to an ACCO, the CEO will be responsible for the management of the child's protection order.

#### **Protection application**

A protection application is made to the Children's Court in relation to a child or young person, who is in need of protection because they have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm.

#### Protection order (also known as a court order)

A protection order is an order made by the Family Division of the Children's Court for the protection and care of a child or young person, if the Court finds that they are in need of protection.

#### Report about a child or young person

If a person has significant concern for the wellbeing of a child or young person, the person may make a report (previously called a notification) to child protection. Certain professionals, including police and teachers, are mandated (obliged by law) to report suspected child abuse to child protection. The identifying details of the reporter to child protection are protected under the Act.

#### Respite

Respite is a component of home-based care that involves a planned time-limited placement, where a child or young person is placed away from the primary caregiver or current living circumstances with an assessed and approved carer.

#### **Reportable Conduct Scheme**

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme seeks to improve organisations' responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect by their workers and volunteers.

#### Reportable conduct

There are five types of reportable conduct, including:

- sexual offences committed against, with, or in the presence of a child or young person
- sexual misconduct committed against, with, or in the presence of a child or young person
- physical violence against, with, or in the presence of a child or young person
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child or young person
- significant neglect of a child or young person.

#### Reunification

Return of a child or young person to the care of a parent.

#### **Secretary**

This refers to the position of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

### Substantiation (of harm to a child or young person)

Substantiation refers to the decision about whether a child or young person has experienced (or is currently at risk of) significant harm to their safety, stability or development. That is, child protection is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the child or young person is in need of protection.

#### Team manager

The team manager leads a team of child protection staff or Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care staff. The team manager is the case planner, and is responsible for decisions that affect children and young people who are allocated to their team. They also manage cases awaiting allocation, and the allocation of cases and tasks to the team members.

#### The Act

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

#### The department

The Department of Health and Human Services.

#### **Undisclosed placement**

This refers to the temporary residence for the child or young person, whose address is not disclosed to the parents.

#### **Working with Children Check**

The Working with Children (WWC) Check is an initiative of the Victorian Government and is administered by the Department of Justice and Regulation. The WWC Check helps to protect children and young people from sexual or physical harm, by checking a person's criminal history for serious sexual, serious violent or serious drug offences, and the person's work history, with specific professional disciplinary bodies for certain findings.

### List of acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault
ChildFIRST	Child and Family Information, Referral and Support
CIMS	Client Incident Management System
DHHS (the department)	Department of Health and Human Services
GP	general practitioner
KESO	Koorie Engagement Support Officer
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
SFYS	School Focused Youth Service
SSAGDI	same-sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex
STI	Sexually transmittable infection
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAHS	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VMIA	Victorian Managed Insurance Authority
VTG	Victorian Training Guarantee
wwcc	Working with Children Check
YODAA	Youth, Drugs and Alcohol Advice
YSAS	Youth Support and Advocacy Service



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# Information sheet 1: **Types of out-of-home care**

In Victoria, out-of-home care services provide care for children and young people who cannot live at home with their parents. This information sheet outlines the different types of out-of-home care arrangements, or living arrangements, for these children and young people.

#### Home-based care

Kinship care	The child or young person is placed with a relative, significant friend or member of their social network. Kinship care is the explicitly preferred placement type and is always the first care option.
Foster care	The child or young person is cared for by an approved and accredited foster carer. Carers and the children and young people in their care are supported by agencies funded by the department to provide foster care programs.
Permanent care	The child or young person is placed permanently with a carer (or carers), who is assessed and approved to provide permanent care for a child or young person. Once a Court order has been made, a permanent carer becomes the parent of the child or young person, and has parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others. Child protection involvement ceases when the permanent care order is granted. Decisions about permanent care are made in the best interests of the child or young person.  Permanent carers are required to preserve the child or young person's identity, connection to culture and the relationship with their biological families, unless the Court determines otherwise. Court-ordered contact between the child or young person and their biological parent is limited to up to four times per year in the first 12 months of the order. More contact can be arranged by agreement between the permanent carer parents and biological parents, or by seeking to vary the order at the end of the first 12 months. The child or young person's biological parents need to seek the leave of the Court to vary the order.  For a child or young person in a kinship or foster care placement, it may be in their best interests to remain with their carer under a permanent care order.  The permanent care order remains in place until the young person turns 18.

#### **Adoption**

In Victoria, adoption is governed by the *Adoption Act 1984* and is most commonly used for children whose biological parents have given consent for them to be adopted. The number of adoptions is small, with approximately 20 adoptions occurring in Victoria each year.

Pre-adoption care arrangements are provided under the Adoption Act by a small number of experienced carers, who play an important role in helping babies and children transition to their new family.

#### Residential care

Residential care provides a home for a young person, typically aged between 12–18 years, who often have behaviours that place them

at high risk of harm, and where they need a team of carers around them to help them settle. Alternative care arrangements will be sought while a young person is in residential care.

#### Lead tenant

Lead tenant is a semi-independent accommodation option for young people aged 16 to 18 years, who are child protection clients and are moving towards independence. Young people are supported by a live-in volunteer (a lead tenant), who shares the community-based accommodation, and an outreach support team.

#### **Useful resources**

For more information about the different **types of out-of-home care**, visit the Department of Health and Human Services website at <services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/caring-children>

# Information sheet 2: Questions to ask when a child or young person is placed in your care

When a child or young person comes into your care, there are a number of questions you should ask child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency. While these questions are designed to help you understand the needs of the child or young person, and the potential impact on your home, family life and routines, child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency may not be able to provide all the information you request.

#### General questions to ask

- What is the expected length of the care arrangement?
- Why does this child or young person need a kinship care arrangement?
- Does the child or young person have any allergies or illnesses?
- Does the child or young person have any particular dietary requirements?
- Are there any sensitive key issues to be aware of?
- What is their emotional or physical state?
- Is there anything I should know about how to support the individual needs of the child or young person?
- What cultural supports are available for the child or young person to ensure connection to community?

- What Aboriginal services are available in my area?
- What does the child or young person understand about why they have come into my care?
- Is there training or support available to make this kinship care arrangement successful?
- If the child or young person is coming into my care from another carer, is it possible to speak with the previous carer?
- Why did the previous care arrangement break down?
- What items are needed to care for the child or young person and what is needed to help them settle in?

### Questions to ask about Court and protection orders

- What protection order is the child or young person on?
- Are there any special protection order conditions I need to know about?
- Are there any key meetings or court dates that I would be required to attend?

#### Questions to ask about contact arrangements

- What contact plans are in place?
- What is the frequency of any contact plans?
- Will their contact arrangements fit with my family?

- Who is the contact with?
- Where are contact visits to be held? Will I need to provide transport or support for the child or young person with contact?
- Are the contact visits supervised, and if so, by whom?

#### Questions to ask about routines

- Does the child or young person attend childcare, preschool or school?
- Will they continue to attend the same childcare, preschool or school? If so, what are the transport, hours and support requirements for this?
- Does the child or young person have extracurricular activities, such as basketball or swimming, that I will need to provide transport for and support?



# Information sheet 3: Responding to a disclosure of abuse

If a child or young person has been abused, they are more likely to disclose this when they start feeling safe. Disclosures could be about themselves or about things they have seen.

It is important to think about the possibility of a disclosure and how you would respond, before such a situation arises. This will help you be prepared and respond as well as possible, because when a child or young person discloses to you, they will be very aware of your immediate reaction. If you respond with shock, they will feel this.

It helps to stay calm and accepting of the child or young person's story, listen and comfort them. There are a number of things you can do if a child or young person discloses to you that they have been abused:

#### Do:

- listen to them and let them tell you in their own words
- stay calm and be patient, and allow the child or young person to talk at their own pace
- reassure the child or young person that you believe them and that telling you is the right thing to do
- reassure them that it is not their fault and they are not responsible for the abuse
- tell the child or young person what you need to do next, such as inform child protection

- or the agency (if involved), and that you will support them if anything needs to be done following this
- tell the child or young person that the agency (if involved) will contact child protection, which will help make sure they are safe
- tell the child or young person it is likely the police will need to be contacted (for sexual and physical abuse)
- reassure them there are people they can talk to, such as the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) for sexual abuse
- be truthful
- be respectful to the sensitive nature of the information and only talk to those who need to know.

#### Do not:

- show signs of panic, shock or anger
- go over the information or put your own interpretation on the information
- pressure the child or young person into telling more than they are ready to disclose
- keep asking questions to elicit more information
- tell them you can keep their disclosure a secret
- make promises you cannot keep
- be surprised if children or young people retract their statements
- confront the person alleged to be the abuser.

If the child or young person in your care discloses abuse, you will need to call their case manager **as soon as possible** – especially if the child or young person will be placed at further risk. Be ready to give as much information as possible about the disclosure. Every bit of information is vital if the matter is to go to court.

If you suspect abuse, but the child or young person has not told anyone, be aware of the emotional distress that they may be experiencing. Approach them in a caring and sensitive manner, and assure them that you are willing to listen and to help if there is a problem.

These types of conversations can be very confronting. It is not an easy topic and you will be forced to think about it as you go on caring for the child or young person. The experience could leave you feeling angry, sickened and sad, or you may tap into unresolved memories of your own. Talk to people, call the child or young person's case manager or call CASA for support.

#### Useful resources

- Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) there are 15 CASAs across Victoria. The CASA Forum is the peak body that works with all of the CASAs. The CASA Forum website has contact details and website links for the CASAs <a href="http://www.casa.org.au/">http://www.casa.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Sexual Assault Crisis Line (Victoria)— a statewide, after-hours, confidential telephone crisis counselling service for victims and survivors of past and recent sexual assault. Call 1800 806 292 or visit <a href="http://www.sacl.com.au/">http://www.sacl.com.au/</a>
- ▶ 1800 RESPECT (Australia) a national 24-hour phone counselling service for sexual assault and domestic violence. Call 1800 737 732 or visit <a href="https://www.1800respect.org.au/">https://www.1800respect.org.au/</a>
- ▶ Reportable Conduct Scheme <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/</a>

# Information sheet 4: **Privacy and photographs**

## Commonly asked questions about photographs

## Q: Can photos of the child or young person in my care be put on my fridge or in frames around the house?

**A:** Yes, they can. Always ask the child or young person if they would like their photos displayed in the house. For many children and young people, this gives a sense of belonging. When they leave or transition out of your care, ask if they would like to include the photos in an album to take with them.

## Q: Can photos of the children and young people in my care be put on my Facebook page?

A: Always check what the policy is with child protection or the agency. It is highly recommended that you use social media cautiously and thoughtfully. It is important to have a discussion with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager if you require more information, advice or support, before deciding whether or not to post photos of a child or young person in your care on social media. Care needs to be taken to ensure the child or young person is not identified as being subject to a Children's Court protection order.

The Act has clear penalties where confidentiality breaches occur. Be aware that photos may reveal the child or young person's location. Some smart phones embed tags that can provide geographic information. Other photos can provide clues, such as a school or city name. Think before you post. Be sensitive to how messages may be interpreted by others, including the child or young person's parents, and child protection worker or agency case manager.

### Q: Can photos of children or young people be published in their school newsletter?

A: Wherever appropriate, children and young people in care should be included in school photos, including newsletters. In most cases, parents are aware of the school their child or young person is attending and will not want them excluded from these. However, care must be given to the possible consequences of children or young people's photos being published in school publications, such as where there is a risk of their school being identified by a parent whose access is significantly restricted. Care needs to be taken to ensure the child or young person is not identified as being subject to a Children's Court protection order.

It is essential that relevant school staff are advised of any confidentiality and safety issues regarding the children and young people appearing in school publications.

You should always check with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager that parents are comfortable with the publication of their child or young person's photo, prior to publication occurring.

### Q: Can children or young people's photos be published in newspapers?

**A:** Children and young people participating in community sport or other activities, such as a community event, may find their achievements published by local newspapers or broadcast by local television news.

Care needs to be taken to ensure the child or young person is not identified as being subject to a Children's Court protection order and never refer to court matters. Wherever possible, ensure appropriate permissions have been obtained from child protection or the agency, and the child or young person's parents, prior to photos being taken.

## Q. Are there protocols for displaying photographs of family members of Aboriginal children and young people?

A. Across Victoria and the country, there may be cultural and/or family protocols relating to deaths in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Protocols for displaying photographs, images, and/or speaking someone's name that need to be respected. If not already known, you may need to become informed of this process to assist the child or young person if they are on a journey of cultural identity. It is recommended that you speak with your local Aboriginal community service for advice about the correct protocols and procedures.

#### **Useful resources**

- Cultural protocols relating to deaths in Indigenous communities <a href="https://apps.indigenous.gov.au/cultural\_protocol.htm">https://apps.indigenous.gov.au/cultural\_protocol.htm</a>
- What are cultural protocols?
  <a href="http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/cultural-protocols/">http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/cultural-protocols/
- An introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and perspectives <a href="http://www.racgp.org.au/yourracgp/faculties/aboriginal/guides/cultural-protocols/">http://www.racgp.org.au/yourracgp/faculties/aboriginal/guides/cultural-protocols/</a>

### Information sheet 5: Case planning, case management, roles and responsibilities

This information sheet outlines the elements of the case planning, management and decision making in relation to children and young people in out-of-home care. It also sets out the roles and responsibilities of child protection, the agency (if involved), the kinship carer, and others involved in their care.

#### Best interests case practice model

The Act provides the statutory framework aimed at protecting children and young people from significant harm.

In Victoria, the Best interests case practice model provides the foundation for working with children and young people, and their families, to address issues and to provide a supportive and cohesive response. Effective practice requires the development of good working relationships between services, including working in partnership with parents, where possible, with the child's best interests being central to this approach. More information about the Best interests case practice model can be found in the Child Protection Manual at <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/best-interests-case-practice-model/</a>>.

#### Case plans

Case plans and case plan reviews are required under the Act. A case plan outlines the significant decisions for the child or young person. A case plan is different to a care plan, which supports the day-to-day care of the child or young person.

#### A case plan occurs:

- within 21 days following the substantiation of child protection concerns, or
- six weeks after the making of a protection order, or
- when there are significant changes to the child or young person's circumstances.

A case plan sets out a permanency objective for the child or young person. Section 167 of the Act states that a case plan must include one of five permanency objectives, which are listed in order of preference, being:

- family preservation the objective of ensuring that a child or young person who is in the care of their parent remains in their care
- family reunification the objective of ensuring that a child or young person who has been removed from the care of a parent is returned to their care
- adoption the objective of placing a child for adoption under the Adoption Act 1984
- permanent care the objective of arranging a permanent care arrangement for a child or young person with a permanent carer or carers
- long-term out-of-home care the objective of placing the child or young person in a stable, long-term care arrangement with a specified carer or carers, or if that arrangement is not possible, another suitable long-term care arrangement.

For the majority of children and young people involved with child protection, the most appropriate permanency objective will be to remain in the care of a parent. For those children or young people who come into out-of-home care, family reunification will almost always be the preferred permanency objective, subject to timelines.

For a very small proportion of children and young people with whom child protection intervenes, a permanent out-of-home care arrangement will be required to ensure their safety and wellbeing. It is important that this decision is made as soon as possible, and within a timeframe that promotes the child or young person's developmental and emotional needs.

#### Case management

Case management is the coordination and delivery of services that are provided as part of a case plan. Case management responsibility for the child or young person either sits with child protection or is contracted to the agency. For kinship carers, the majority of case management responsibility sits with child protection.

When a child or young person is first placed in out-of-home care, the child protection worker is the case manager. However, this responsibility may be transferred to an agency (called case contracting), when the decision has been made for the child or young person to remain in long-term, out-of-home care. The roles and

responsibilities of the agency case manager and the child protection worker change when case management is contracted to the agency.

Some of the tasks of the case manager include:

- undertaking ongoing assessment of the risks, needs and development of the child or young person
- ensuring the implementation of the case plan and cultural plan
- having contact with the child or young person, parents and carer
- participating in the care team
- planning and managing contact arrangements for the child or young person
- arranging and making referrals for specialist assessments
- preparing court reports and attending court.

Regardless of who has the case management responsibility for the child or young person, child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency will remain responsible for case planning, case planning decisions, and ensuring the cultural plan is developed for Aboriginal children and young people.

#### Care team roles and responsibilities

The table below provides a list of tasks and who is responsible for them. The 'allocated case manager' will either be the child protection worker or, in some instances, the agency case manager. You will need to know who holds case management responsibility for the child or young person in your care.

## Roles and responsibilities of the carer, child protection/authorised Aboriginal agency and case manager (agency or child protection)

		Who is responsible	
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency
Care team			
Establish the <b>care team</b> and make recommendations about the day-to-day care of the child or young person			<b>✓</b>
Make sure an initial <b>Care and Placement Plan</b> is developed and documented within two weeks of the child or young person coming into care, and a copy is provided to the care team			✓
All members of the care team, including carers, contribute to the development of the Care and Placement Plan	1		<b>✓</b>
Be an active member of the child or young person's <b>care team</b>	J		✓
Make recommendations to the child protection case planner about the specific decisions a carer is authorised to make	1		✓
Approve <b>authorisation for carers</b> for things such as routine medical/dental treatment, travel, school activities and camps.		✓	

	Who is responsible		
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency
Work together to contribute to the development and implementation of the child or young person's case plan and Looking After Children planning processes, including the Care and Placement Plan	V		✓
Maintain open communication so that all members of the care team are kept up to date with important information	1		<b>✓</b>
Make sure that <b>information is only disclosed</b> outside the care team to those who need to know	1	✓	✓
Ensure that members of the care team are informed of the child or young person's progress, including any relevant issues and concerns. In particular, concerns about ongoing care arrangements must be communicated as soon as possible	V		✓
Case planning			
Communicate the permanency objective in the case plan to the carer and agency (if involved)		✓	
Lead the <b>development and review of the case plan</b> and ensure the care team contributes to the development of the plan		✓	

		Who is responsible	
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency
Lead the <b>implementation of the case</b> plan and ensure the care team  contributes to the development of the plan			<b>✓</b>
Ensure that a <b>Care and Transition Plan</b> is prepared and followed to support a young person when they are leaving care	<b>√</b>		<b>✓</b>
Engagement with parents and wider fo	ımily (where ap	propriate)	
Work with the child or young person's family to <b>promote family reunification</b>	<b>√</b> *		✓
Promote and support the <b>relationship</b> of children and young people with their parents and wider family, and their connection with their social networks and community	✓		<b>✓</b>
Engage parents in a manner that is accepting and respectful of their primary role. Promote positive relationships where possible	<b>/</b> *		<b>✓</b>
<b>Transport child or young person</b> to and from contact as required	<b>/</b> *		<b>✓</b>
Inform carers of any <b>changes to</b> contact arrangements in a timely manner			✓

<sup>\*</sup> May not be the core role of the carer, however carers involvement in these activities is important for the child or young person.

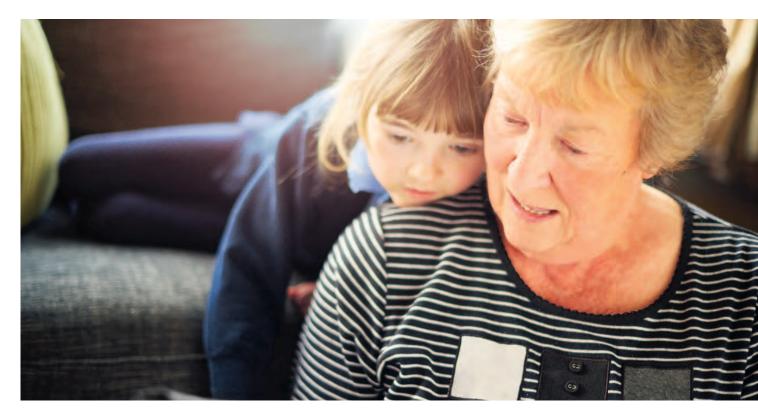
	Who is responsible		
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency
Care of the child or young person			
Provide carers with the information they need to provide good care for a child or young person, at the time the care arrangement is made		✓	<b>✓</b>
Provide <b>day-to-day care</b> and support for the child or young person	✓		
Provide a <b>safe and nurturing home</b> environment that contributes to all aspects of healthy development for children and young people, including their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, cultural and spiritual needs	√		
Provide <b>support and advocate for children and young people</b> in out-of- home care	1		<b>✓</b>
Work with the child or young person to make sure they understand their situation, and that their needs are being met in the care arrangement	✓		<b>✓</b>
Support the child or young person to access and participate in local, day-to-day extra-curricular activities	1		<b>✓</b>
Respond to the <b>needs of the child or young person</b> and include them in planning and decision making where possible	<b>√</b>	✓	<b>✓</b>

<sup>\*</sup> May not be the core role of the carer, however carers involvement in these activities is important for the child or young person.

		Who is responsible		
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency	
Update carers as information changes for example, any changes to appointments			<b>✓</b>	
Record and <b>act on information</b> provided by carers, and inform the carer of outcomes where appropriate			<b>✓</b>	
Arrange for appropriate <b>care allowance and other supports</b> to be provided to carers, in liaison with the child protection worker, if an agency is involved		✓	<b>✓</b>	
Obtain a Health Care Card, Medicare Card, birth certificate and other documents for the child or young person as required		✓		
Arrange for children and young people to attend specialist medical, educational or therapeutic services	<b>√</b> *		<b>✓</b>	
Ascertain the <b>immunisation status</b> of the child or young person, and request authorisation for the carer to take them for necessary catch-ups	<b>/</b> *		<b>✓</b>	
Inform the agency of any <b>emergencies</b> or critical incidents as soon as possible	✓			
Investigate and assess <b>reports of harm</b> to the child or young person		✓	✓	

<sup>\*</sup> May not be the core role of the carer, however carers involvement in these activities is important for the child or young person.

<i>'</i>		Who is responsible	
Role	Kinship carer	Child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency case planner, or child protection or authorised Aboriginal agency task only	Allocated case manager, either child protection or agency
Supporting carers			
Provide <b>support</b> , <b>supervision</b> , <b>information and training</b> to carers, so they can carry out their roles and responsibilities			<b>√</b>
Review carers annually			✓



# Information sheet 6: The impact of caring and looking after yourself

The demands of being a carer can be high. It is important that you manage your health and wellbeing, which may help in your role as a carer. You are the best person to know what makes you feel better emotionally, physically and mentally.

This information sheet provides some practical tips and suggestions to look after yourself, things to expect or consider, and where to get support.

#### The impact of caring

Your caring role will affect many areas of your life. When so much of your focus is on caring for a child or young person in need, it is easy to put aside your own needs. It is important to recognise that not only are there daily physical demands, but often, there are significant emotional issues that can add to the pressures of your caring role. You may be caring for an Aboriginal child or young person, and also be providing services in the Koorie community – sometimes to children and young people.

The issues can be many and varied, but try to be especially conscious of things like:

- your own stress levels
- recognising your emotions and how you respond to situations
- what measures you take to look after your physical and mental health and wellbeing
- how you manage stress

Simply being aware of the potential impacts, in the context of your own situation and particular responses, means that you are more likely to recognise any warning signs and ask for help if needed. You may need to seek support at various times in your caring role, to assist with understanding your own reactions, and for advice about how to manage these effectively.

While you are busy trying to help a child or young person, your own confidence and self-regard may take some hard knocks. With some of the daily pressures you face, it can be challenging to maintain positive self-thinking and self-regard. It may help to have regular and honest assessments of what you expect of yourself in this caring role.

#### Ask yourself:

- Do you have realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the timeframe you have in mind? Or are they more in the realm of wishful thinking and need to be broken down into smaller, more achievable expectations?
- Are there other ways of measuring progress, other than success or failure? What might these be?
- When and how do you celebrate the successes, and do you reflect on the part you played in achieving them?
- Are you realistic about what you expect from yourself? Are you too hard on yourself if expectations are not met? Can you forgive yourself and move on if this happens?

#### Support and network groups

The good news is that support is available. Being aware of what supports are available is crucial for a successful caring relationship. These may include emotional support, physical and practical support, financial support, education and learning, task-focused and problem-solving support, respite care, community support and social support.

The child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager is there to support you to meet the needs of the child or young person. This may be in the form of information and access to local support services, or help with managing contact with the child or young person's parents or other family members. Remember to raise issues in meetings with the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager, so they can be discussed and recorded if required.

#### **Kinship Carers Victoria**

Kinship Carers Victoria is the peak body for kinship carers in Victoria. Kinship Carers Victoria aims to have kinship carers in Victoria supported in their role, according to their needs and the needs of the children and young people they care for.

Kinship Carers Victoria can be contacted by calling (03) 9372 2422 or by email <a href="mailto:kirchor@grandparents.com.au">director@grandparents.com.au</a>.

#### Support groups

Kinship carer support groups operate in various locations across Victoria – usually, there is at least one provided by each agency. Please contact Kinship Carers Victoria on (03) 9372 2422 for information about a support group in your area.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations providing kinship care services facilitate Aboriginal kinship care support groups. Contact your local agency for more information.

#### Health

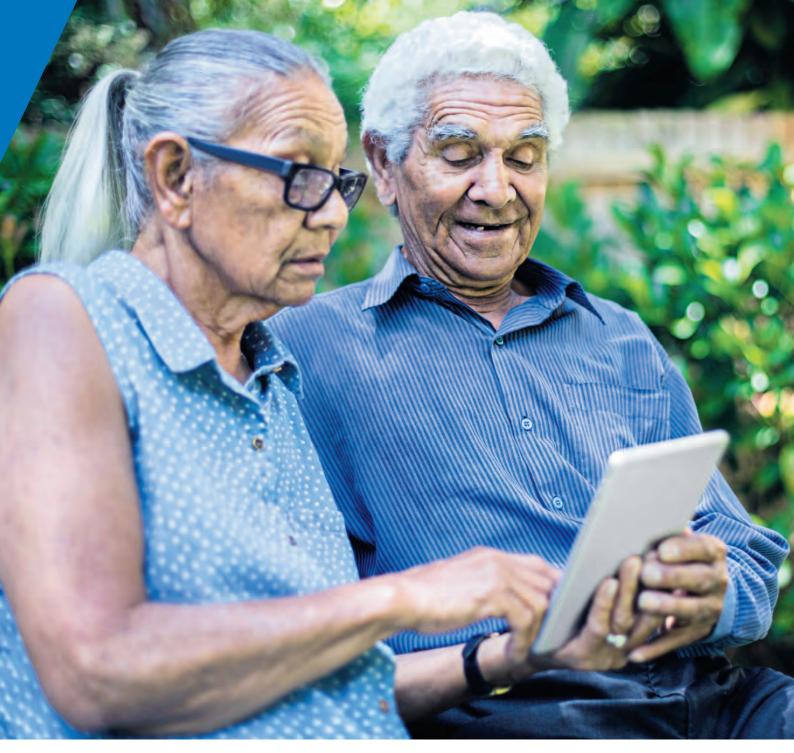
When you are caring for others, it is easy to forget about your own needs or put off concerns for another day. It is important to make time to attend to your own health needs. This may mean asking for help so that you can get to appointments.

Having a regular check-up and following up on any advice or concerns with your doctor is essential. Both physical and emotional health issues should be given consideration, as these are closely linked and one can adversely affect the other. When you are feeling tired, it is even more important to be conscious of health needs and act on any warning signs quickly.

#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ CREATE the national body creating a better life for children and young people in the care system. Call 1800 655 105 or visit the website at <a href="https://create.org.au/">https://create.org.au/</a>>
- ▶ **Kinship Carers Victoria** to contact Victoria's peak body for kinship carers, call (03) 9372 2422, email *<director@grandparents.com.au>* or visit *<http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/>*
- ▶ Mirabel Foundation addresses the needs of children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to parental drug use and are now in the care of extended relatives, call (03) 9527 9422, email <a href="mailto:kirabel@mirabelfoundation.org.au">Mirabel@mirabelfoundation.org.au</a> or visit <a href="https://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au">https://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au</a>
- ▶ Permanent Care and Adoptive Families call (03) 9020 1833, email <info@pcafamilies.org.au> or visit <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/>
- Victorian Aboriginal kinship care and kinship care service providers on the Department of Health and Human Services website <a href="https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/kinship-care">https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/kinship-care</a> or see Information sheet 11. Key contacts





# Information sheet 7: **Aboriginal culture**

This information sheet provides a snapshot of information to help you enhance your knowledge about Aboriginal culture in Victoria, and the cultural needs of the child or young person you are caring for. Further information about caring for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care can be found in the Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care resource developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

Culture plays a key role in the Aboriginal child or young person's development, identity and self-esteem, and in determining their overall wellbeing.

As a relative carer of an Aboriginal child or young person, you have a significant role in fostering their Aboriginal identity and connection to culture. If you prioritise and understand the importance of Aboriginal culture to a child or young person's wellbeing and positive development, and you bring this into your home, you are more likely to raise Aboriginal children and young people who experience better life outcomes. The impact of culture on overall wellbeing cannot be underestimated.

### **Terminology**

'Koori' or 'Koorie' is a term used by the Aboriginal community to refer to clan groups that are from Victoria and some parts of New South Wales. Aboriginal people may also identify themselves, according to the language group of their family's ancestral lands, for example, Yorta Yorta.

'Community' refers to Aboriginal people living in Victoria who may belong or identify with one or more communities. For example, they may identify with their ancestral lands and country where their family is from, which may not be where they now live or work. Aboriginal people may also be part of the local Aboriginal community where they live or work. Community is about interrelatedness and belonging, and is central to Aboriginality.

### **Aboriginal culture**

For Aboriginal people, land, kinship system and spirituality are the foundations on which culture is built and grown. They share deep spiritual connection with the land, and relationships are not only with other family and people, but also with all aspects of the environment.

Elders are held in the highest regard by the Aboriginal community. In Victoria, Elders can be people who have lived in an area for a long time and are respected community members, or traditional Elders who are descendants of the area and active in community issues. When addressing an Elder, it is important to acknowledge their status as aunty or uncle.

Elders have a significant role in the community to teach, guide and hand down cultural information and traditional knowledge. Every Aboriginal child or young person should be made aware of their Elders and have opportunities to meet and spend time with them.

In learning about culture, it is important that you are aware diversity exists among Aboriginal and Torres Strait people across Australia. If you do not already know, it is important for you to learn about the Aboriginal child or young person in your care, including asking:

- Where are they from and who is their mob?
- How much do they know about their culture, traditions and practices?
- What are their connections to their family, Elders and community?
- What are their interests and involvement in community events and activities?

This will help you to understand the child or young person, and support them in connection to their community, the local Aboriginal community and their culture.

#### **Torres Strait Islander culture**

Torres Strait Islander people and culture have many significant differences to Aboriginal culture and people, including child-rearing practices. However, both share the same disadvantages regarding health, education, welfare and economic outcomes, due to the ongoing negative impact colonisation practices have had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The islands of the Torres Strait are located between mainland Queensland's Cape York Peninsular and Papua New Guinea, and are the traditional lands of Torres Strait Islander people. Torres Strait Islander culture and language vary from island to island, although there are shared cultural characteristics across the Torres Strait.

When caring for Torres Strait Islander children and young people, it is important that you are aware of these differences and seek to either obtain or maintain their cultural connections to Torres Strait Islander communities, both in the Torres Strait and mainland Australia.

#### **Historical context**

Colonisation and past government policies have impacted on Aboriginal people, with the forcible removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, the forcible removal of children from their families and penalties imposed on Aboriginal people practising culture. This has denied many Aboriginal people their culture and had significant impacts on life outcomes.

Many Aboriginal people have lost their traditional lands, aspects of culture, language, connections to community and family. These losses are not just historical events, but are experienced by Aboriginal children, young people, their families and the Aboriginal community, as current losses that still require mourning.

#### **Trauma**

For Aboriginal families and children, the losses that Aboriginal people have experienced have had a profound impact on their social, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. They continue to be passed down to the next generation through what is known as 'transgenerational' trauma.

Aboriginal children and young people in care will also have experienced trauma that has resulted in them coming to live with you.

### Aboriginal child placement principle

The Aboriginal child placement principle is in place to make sure that Aboriginal people are consulted on all decisions regarding Aboriginal children and young people involved with child protection, so that there is cultural consideration on all decisions, and there is not a repeat of past government policies that resulted in the Stolen Generation

This principle aims to ensure that Aboriginal children are connected and placed within the Aboriginal community where possible. Where children are removed, the principle requires child protection to try to reunite the Aboriginal children with their family, where it is in their best interests and safe to do so.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle governs the practice of child protection workers when placing an Aboriginal child or young person in out-of-home care, and specifies the order of priority in which types of placement are to be considered.

This hierarchy includes that:

- the child or young person must be placed within the extended family or with relatives
- if the above is not possible and after consultation with the relevant Aboriginal agency, the child or young person may be placed with:
  - a. an Aboriginal family from the local community and within close geographic proximity to the natural family
  - an Aboriginal family from another Aboriginal community
  - c. as a last resort, a non-Aboriginal placement family living in close proximity to the natural family.

### Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency delivers the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service in all locations, except Mildura, where it is provided by the Mallee District Aboriginal Service. The service provides culturally appropriate advice and consultation for all significant decisions about a child or young person involved with child protection.

### Aboriginal cultural identity

A child or young person's cultural identity is a critical feature of who they are. Children and young people who are strong in their culture, and see that their culture is valued by others, are more likely to develop a positive self-image. Denying them access to their culture is harmful, because it strikes at their sense of identity.

For Aboriginal children and young people, displaying respect for their Aboriginal culture and identity is critical to their comfort and pride in themselves, and their environment. You can promote the rich diversity and strength of Aboriginal culture to all those who seek to do their best for Aboriginal children and young people.

### **Cultural plans**

Non-Aboriginal carers, child protection workers and agency case workers caring for an Aboriginal child or young person have an active role in making sure they do not lose connection with their family, community and culture.

When an Aboriginal child or young person is placed in out-of-home care, a cultural plan must be developed and linked to their case plan. It is the responsibility of child protection or the authorised Aboriginal agency to ensure the plan is developed. You and the agency case manager (if involved) will be included in the development of a cultural plan.

You have an important role in implementing the cultural plan to support the child or young person to maintain their connections to community and culture every day.

### **Cultural safety**

An Aboriginal child or young person should feel culturally safe. This means that they should view their Aboriginality positively and see that others are positive about their culture at school, in the community and in their interactions with other services.

If you are a non-Aboriginal family member, you can make your home a place of cultural safety by acknowledging and respecting the child's culture, as well as including objects in the home that Aboriginal people place spiritual and cultural value on. Participating in cultural awareness training will assist you in providing a culturally safe environment for the Aboriginal child or young person in your care.

### Aboriginal kinship system

The Aboriginal kinship system continues to be a cultural strength for families and communities. This system creates a network of people who have a responsibility for the care and day-to-day needs of children and young people.

From a young age, Aboriginal children learn about their kinship relationships, and are introduced to a broad network of family and community members. They are taught who they are, their significance within the kinship group, and their responsibility and relationship with each person. As they grow they are identified through this system within their own mob or community, and in other communities.

These learnings and experiences are essential in raising children and young people to have a strong Aboriginal identity, wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Where possible, you will need to support the child or young person to maintain contact and develop links with their kinship network, and ensure they have contact with their family and community, so that they remain and are recognised by others as part of this network. As a family member, you are in an ideal position to ensure this happens.

### **Aboriginal child-rearing practices**

Aboriginal child-rearing practices can differ significantly to your practices if you are not Aboriginal. In Aboriginal child rearing, the whole Aboriginal community contributes to raising a child or young person, giving mutual assistance and support to the parents.

Child-rearing practices can also differ in other ways. For instance, Aboriginal people allow children and young people to play with less adult involvement, and discipline is commonly taught through humour, teasing and surprised responses.

If you are not already familiar, it is important to understand Aboriginal child-rearing practices, to better understand the child or young person's behaviour and responses to practices in your home. You can access resources through the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), and talk to your agency or local ACCO about getting support from the Aboriginal community.

### **Aboriginal language**

There has been a significant loss of Aboriginal language through past government assimilation policies. Koorie English has been evolving, particularly in Victoria. Aboriginal English is the first language or home language of many Aboriginal children throughout Australia. This is often mistaken by non-Aboriginal people as bad English. For Aboriginal people, using Koorie English or Aboriginal English is a statement of identity. It is important that you do not correct or prevent children from using this language.

#### **Cultural lens**

The term 'cultural lens' is used to describe how we understand behaviour and values, by moving beyond our own cultural approaches. It is about seeking explanations for behaviours that may not make sense to you, but are cultural practices. For example, some Aboriginal children and young people will find it unsettling to have a room of their own.

If you are not Aboriginal, you need to remember that your culture is different. Make sure you understand and don't misinterpret behaviour, due to your lack of understanding of their culture. Help is available through the case manager and where possible, the Aboriginal family can be engaged to provide cultural advice.

### **Current issues facing Aboriginal people**

The effects of colonisation, dispossession from land, forced removal of Aboriginal children and young people, past government policies and racism have led to significant disadvantage in the Aboriginal community. The issues facing the Aboriginal community include high rates of unemployment, poorer health, and higher levels of disability, earlier deaths, family violence and substance misuse.

Aboriginal children and young people are at significant disadvantage, when compared with non-Aboriginal children in regards to:

- low birth rate
- higher rates of hospitalisation
- lower immunisation rates
- lower rates of attendance at preschool

- lower educational achievement
- higher rates of middle ear infections
- higher rates of involvement with juvenile justice
- high rates of involvement with child protection and placement in out-of-home care.

However, most Aboriginal children and young people remain at home with their families, and are thriving and achieving positive life outcomes within loving, supportive, and well-resourced families and communities.

### Importance of using Aboriginal services

Aboriginal people feel culturally safe using Aboriginal services. These services are provided by Aboriginal organisations that understand the Aboriginal culture, and the issues facing Aboriginal people, so they are able to provide holistic services. Where possible, it is beneficial to the child or young person to utilise these services. Most of these services are free.

It is also important to acknowledge that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may also choose not to access Aboriginal-specific services. In this case, mainstream services are available.

### **Confirmation of Aboriginality**

Some Aboriginal services may ask for a letter confirming a person's Aboriginality to access their services. If a child or young person in your care cannot access a service without a confirmation of Aboriginality letter, contact your agency case worker, as there are processes in place with ACCOs to apply for one.

A letter of confirmation of Aboriginality acknowledges that an ACCO has confirmed there is evidence that a person:

- is of Aboriginal descent
- identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait
   Islander
- is accepted as an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island community.

If a child or young person does not have this letter, it does not mean they are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

### Recognising cultural abuse

Cultural abuse refers to any actions or attitudes that ignore, denigrate or intentionally attack the culture of a person or community. It is important that you are able to recognise cultural abuse of a child or young person in your care, and take action to address the behaviour. It is also important that you seek advice and support from child protection or the agency on the best way to deal with the issues that are occurring.

### Dealing with bullying and racism

As a carer of an Aboriginal child or young person, you may need to deal with the consequences of them being a victim of racism at school, among friends, in the community, or even in your home or neighbourhood.

It is important to develop strategies to deal with racism and bullying before it arises, or before it escalates.

Some things you can do to support the child or young person is to:

- not ignore racism and bullying against them
- ensure that they understand there are laws that make it illegal to discriminate against an individual or group based on their cultural background
- tell them that unjust attitudes or actions are not deserved or acceptable
- be a role model for them on how to advocate on behalf of themselves
- teach them to be respectful while being verbally assertive and confident in their body language and response to racism and bullying.

### Supporting and maintaining cultural connection

Sometimes, Aboriginal children and young people are disconnected from their community and culture. They are often at particular disadvantage, because they do not have the opportunity to experience the strength and richness of Aboriginal culture. They may have been exposed to only negative images and ideas of Aboriginal people, or simply do not know about their community and culture.

Families exposed to the processes of past government policies can impact on knowledge of cultural and spiritual identity. Consequently, Aboriginal children or young people may have low self-esteem and a poor sense of their identity.

It is critical for these children and young people to develop a positive attitude to their Aboriginal culture and community. Seeking support from child protection or the agency, and local Aboriginal services will be helpful.

### Participating in cultural events and activities

Attending cultural events and activities supports children and young people to feel a sense of belonging to their community, enables them to see strong members of their Aboriginal community and spend time with Elders and other Aboriginal people, and helps in the development of a strong cultural identity.

There may be times when kinship carers, children and young people may need to attend funerals, as a result of significant or extended family member passing away. For some communities, there may be specific cultural protocols to assist with grieving and healing processes. Deaths in the Koorie community can occur frequently, so it is important for kinship carers, children and young people to be aware of this and be adequately supported.

When you attend these events with the child or young person, you show them you respect and value Aboriginal cultural identity. If you are not Aboriginal, it provides an opportunity for you to learn more about Aboriginal culture, and what it means for the child or young person and their community.

There are a number of cultural activities that you can attend with the child or young person, or to support them to attend, which may include:

- Aboriginal playgroups, childcare centres or kindergartens
- homework clubs, youth groups and afterschool groups at your local Aboriginal service
- cultural centres and museums like Bunjilaka at Melbourne Museum or Koorie Heritage Trust
- family reunions or camps
- Aboriginal sports carnivals or sporting groups
- community cultural ceremonies.

There are many significant dates and cultural events throughout the year that are important for Aboriginal people to come together to grieve what has been lost, and the impacts of past government policies, but also to celebrate history, culture, achievements, and the resilience and strength of Aboriginal people.

It is important for you to know the dates of these events, and see that the child or young person in your care attends local events with you, their family and community. Local Aboriginal services will be able to provide information about local activities occurring.

Significant cultural events and dates include:

- **Sorry Day** is 26 May each year.
- Reconciliation Week is 27 May to 3 June each year.
- National Aborigines and Islanders Day of Commemoration (NAIDOC) week is in July each year.
- National Aboriginal and Islander Children's
   Day is on 4 August each year.



#### **Useful resources**

- ▶ Aboriginal associations and organisation contact details in the yellow pages <a href="https://www.yellowpages.com.au/vic/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-associations-organisations-40592-category-a1.html">https://www.yellowpages.com.au/vic/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-associations-organisations-40592-category-a1.html</a>
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies <a href="http://aiatsis.gov.au/">http://aiatsis.gov.au/</a>
- ► Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (VACCA) <a href="http://www.vacca.org/">http://www.vacca.org/</a>>
- Commission for Children and Young People provide a range of articles and links on their website <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/</a>
- ▶ Growing up our way: child rearing practice matrix at SNAICC <a href="http://www.snaicc.org.au/">http://www.snaicc.org.au/</a>
- What is Sorry Business?
  <a href="http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/sorry-business/">http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/connecting-to-culture/sorry-business/</a>>
- Information about **child protection laws in Victoria for Koorie families** call 1800 105 303 or visit <a href="http://www.fvpls.org/">http://www.fvpls.org/</a>
- ▶ Koorie Heritage Trust <a href="http://koorieheritagetrust.com.au/">http://koorieheritagetrust.com.au/</a>
- Koorie Youth Council for young Aboriginal people aged 12–25 years of age <a href="http://koorieyouth.org.au/">http://koorieyouth.org.au/</a>
- Magabala Books have a great range of books, including many for children and young people <a href="https://www.magabala.com/">https://www.magabala.com/</a>>
- ▶ News subscriptions are available for:
  - National Indigenous Times <a href="http://nit.com.au/">http://nit.com.au/</a>
  - Koori Mail <a href="http://koorimail.com/">http://koorimail.com/</a>>
  - Deadly Vibe Magazine <a href="http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/">http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/</a>
- Reconciliation Australia <a href="https://www.reconciliation.org.au/">https://www.reconciliation.org.au/</a>
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) the national body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services, and provides training and resources for carers of Aboriginal children, including resources about Aboriginal child rearing practices. Call (03) 9489 8099 or visit <a href="http://www.snaicc.org.au/">http://www.snaicc.org.au/</a>
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) this agency provides training, cultural and parenting information, support for carers, groups and resources. Call (03) 9287 8800 or visit <a href="http://www.vacca.org/">http://www.vacca.org/</a>
- ▶ Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance <a href="http://www.vaccho.org.au/">http://www.vaccho.org.au/</a>



# Information sheet 8: **Education support**

There are many education services and supports available to help children and young people. This information sheet outlines the programs and educational support available to them. Specific education resources for children and young people in out-of-home are also outlined.

### School support programs and packages

Education support programs are available to assist children and young people with high support needs. These programs either support the child or young person directly, or provide resources to those caring for them.

### Preschool Field Officer Program for kindergartens

This program supports the access and participation of children with additional needs in kindergarten. Preschool field officers support kindergartens by providing consultation, resources and advice to teachers. Any statefunded kindergarten program can access this service. You can provide authorisation for a kindergarten to access this assistance for the child in your care.

### Inclusion support for Commonwealthfunded care

The Inclusion and Professional Support
Program aims to improve access and
participation of children with additional needs
in early childhood and childcare services.

This may include assisting childcare services to access specialist equipment, bi-cultural support or the Inclusion Support Subsidy.

In centre-based care, the Inclusion Support Subsidy contributes towards the cost of engaging an extra childcare educator to increase the educator-to-child ratio, when a child or children with ongoing high support needs are in care.

This includes support for:

- children with a disability, including those undergoing assessments for disability
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- children with serious medical conditions
- children presenting with language and speech delays
- children presenting with disruptive behaviour.

For more information about the inclusion programs, visit the **Commonwealth Government Department of Education and Training** website at <www.education.gov.au> and search for the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

### Kindergarten Inclusion Support Package program

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages are designed to build the capacity of funded kindergarten programs, to support the access and participation of children with disabilities, and ongoing high-support needs or complex medical needs.

### Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages

These packages may provide:

- training and consultancy for kindergarten staff to support adjustments, adaptations and modifications of the kindergarten program
- specialist training for kindergarten staff to meet the individual needs of a particular child with a disability, ongoing high-support needs or complex medical needs
- minor building modifications (such as ramps and grip rails) to support a particular child's attendance in the kindergarten program and participation in the activities
- an additional assistant who works as a member of the team delivering a kindergarten program that is inclusive of all children.

Authorisation for Kindergarten Inclusion Support applications may be made by parents or the person who has parental responsibility for the child.

### **Early Childhood Intervention Services**

Early Childhood Intervention Services support children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry. These services provide special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, assistance and support to access early childhood services. Services are designed to meet the needs of the child, and are focused on supporting them in their natural environment, and in their everyday experiences and activities.

When a child in out-of-home care is assessed as being eligible for Early Childhood Intervention Services support, they are prioritised, along with other higher-risk children, as places become available. If services are not already in place, an application for Early Childhood Intervention Services should be an immediate priority when children with a disability or developmental delay enter out-of-home care.

If services are in place, continued access to the Early Childhood Intervention Services supports should be maintained. When a child who is provided with this support is moved to a different location, this may require transferring to another local service.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is currently being rolled out across Victoria. See *Chapter 10*. Caring for children and young people with diverse needs for information on this scheme.

### **LOOKOUT Education Support Centres**

School-aged young Victorians in out-ofhome care are considerably less likely than their peers to attend school and engage with education.

As a result, they are less likely to achieve the national benchmarks for reading and numeracy, or attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification. Young people in out-of-home care tend to move between care settings, and therefore educational settings, so they are at high risk of falling through the cracks educationally.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres are a Department of Education and Training initiative that supports children and young people in out-of-home care to complete their education and achieve their best. The centres offer a multidisciplinary service response, building on the expertise and professional practice within schools, the community sector, and across the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services. Centre staff are based in the Department of Education and Training's regional offices.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centre staff will advocate and support all children and young people in out-of-home care within the education system.

Centres will work in partnership with schools to enrol young people, monitor and evaluate educational progress, set targets, and coordinate resources and activities, to support the child's education at school and at home. This will lead to improvements in school attendance, engagement and achievement.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centre staff will partner with students, schools and carers to get better results for vulnerable students in out-of-home care, who will receive more support than ever to remain engaged with education and training.

For more information, please visit the **Department of Education and Training** website <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/</a> programs/health/Pages/lookout.aspx> or speak to the child or young person's child protection worker or agency case manager.

### **Koorie Engagement Support Officers**

Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs) are an integral part of Victoria's state education system. KESOs support the engagement of Koorie students, families and communities within the government school and early childhood systems, as well as kindergartens and other areas of early childhood.

For more information, contact the **Koorie education coordinator** in your region or visit <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/wannikregional.aspx">http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact/Pages/wannikregional.aspx</a>.



# Information sheet 9: **Age-appropriate sexual behaviours**

### Age-appropriate sexual behaviours

Sex play and sexual behaviour is normal in children and young people. Age-appropriate behaviours do not require intervention by carers and professionals. Children can readily be distracted from these behaviours. The accompanying emotions and expressions of age-appropriate sexual play include laughter, spontaneity, curiosity and experimentation.

### **Concerning sexual behaviours**

Some behaviours signal the need to watch for the frequency and persistence of these behaviours. If a child or young person exhibits several of these behaviours, or they continue despite clear requests to stop, seek advice from child protection or your agency.

### Very concerning sexual behaviours

There are behaviours that are indicative of very concerning sexual behaviour. Most of these behaviours require immediate professional advice, particularly if they are accompanied by secrecy, anxiety, tension, coercion, force, compulsion and threats. Some of the behaviours listed become criminal offences when the child reaches the age of criminal responsibility (10 years of age in Victoria, Australia). Criminal offences require immediate reporting to the police.

For more information on these behaviours, see the Age appropriate sexual behaviour in children and young people chart on the **South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault** (SECASA) website at <a href="http://www.secasa.com.au/">http://www.secasa.com.au/</a> or contact your local Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA). See the list below or visit **CASA** for further information at <a href="http://www.casa.org.au/">http://www.casa.org.au/</a>.

### Sexual abuse behaviour treatment services

Sexually Abusive Behaviour Treatment Services (SABTS) operate across Victoria. SABTS are funded by the department to provide therapeutic treatment to children and their families, to address problem sexual behaviour and sexually abusive behaviour. SABTS work with the child or young person, their family, carers, school and community services to provide an assessment and developmentally appropriate therapeutic response. SABTS are funded to provide therapeutic treatment for up to 24 months, either in a voluntary capacity, or via a statutory Therapeutic Treatment Order (TTO). SABTS services are available to young people under the age of 15 years who exhibit problem sexual behaviour or sexually abusive behaviour. Some agencies also offer treatment programs for young people up to and including 17 years.

The Act enables child protection to receive reports regarding problem sexual behaviour and sexually abusive behaviours of a child aged between 10 years and 14 years. Under the Act, child protection can seek a TTO be granted by the Children's Court, to direct a young person with sexually abusive behaviours to attend an appropriate SABTS treatment program.

Child protection can also support a family to ensure that a child or young person aged 10 years to 14 years attends a SABTS program voluntarily, if appropriate.

SABTS can receive referrals from families, child protection, schools and other community organisations regarding a child exhibiting sexually abusive behaviour, or problem sexual behaviour.

SABTS employ skilled clinicians who use their clinical judgement to develop an effective treatment plan for the child or young person. The plan will consider issues that may impact the family maintaining treatment over a longer period. SABTS may also provide outreach services in some metropolitan and regional areas to ensure treatment accessibility for children with sexually abusive behaviours and their families.

The therapeutic responses provided include a focus on child development, attachment and trauma, and are inclusive of the family. SABTS treatment maximises opportunities for the child or young person to understand their behaviours and the harm caused, to prevent further harm in the future.

For further information and a list of SABTS providers see the Child Protection Manual <a href="http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/high-risk/therpeutic-treatment-reports-and-orders">http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/high-risk/therpeutic-treatment-reports-and-orders</a>.

### Centres Against Sexual Assault across Victoria

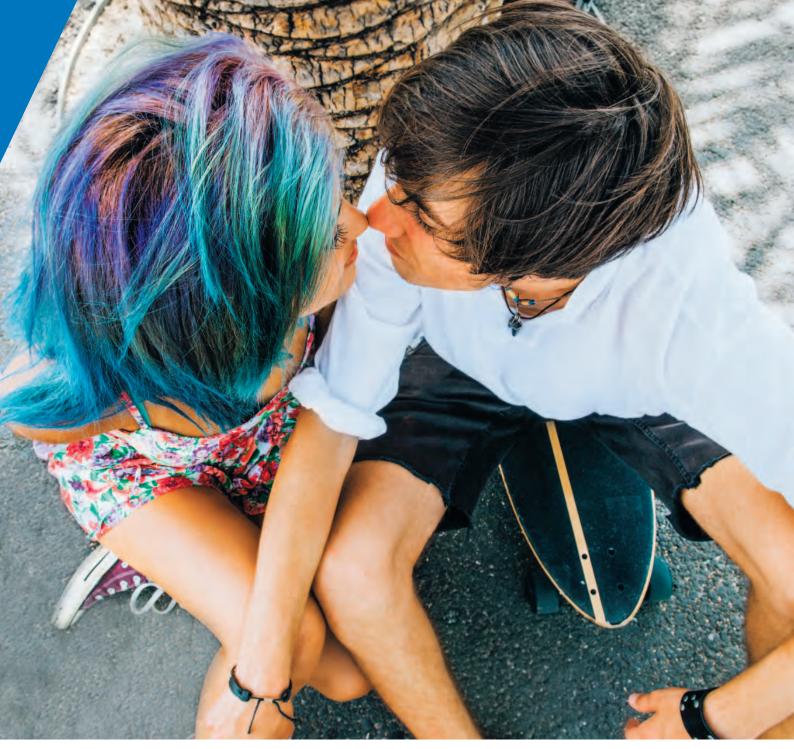
In Victoria, there are 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs), which are non-profit, government-funded organisations that provide support and intervention to women, children and men, who are victims and survivors of sexual assault.

The Victorian Sexual Assault Crisis Line (after hours) offers free, confidential 24-hour emergency or crisis care for victims and survivors of sexual assault. This includes crisis counselling support, and access to medical care and legal services, as well as counselling support for adults who were abused in their childhood.

Centres Against Sexual Assault			
Name	Address	Contact details	
Sexual Assault Crisis Line	Victoria	Call 1800 806 292	
Metropolitan CASAs			
CASA House	Level 3, 210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne, 3000	Call (03) 9635 3600 Email: <casa@thewomens.org.au> Website: <www.casahouse.com.au></www.casahouse.com.au></casa@thewomens.org.au>	
Eastern CASA	17 Ware Crescent, Ringwood East, 3135	Call: (03) 9870 7330 Email: <ecasa@easternhealth.org.au> Website: <www.easternhealth.org.au ambulatory-community-="" eastern-centre-against-="" services="" sexual-assault=""></www.easternhealth.org.au></ecasa@easternhealth.org.au>	
Gatehouse Centre	Level 5, South East Building, The Royal Children's Hospital, Flemington Road, Parkville, 3052	Call: (03) 9345 6391 Email: <gatehouse.centre@rch.org.au> Website: <www.rch.org.au gatehouse=""></www.rch.org.au></gatehouse.centre@rch.org.au>	
Northern CASA	Building 26, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, 300 Waterdale Road, Heidelberg West, 3081	Call: (03) 9497 1768 Email: <ncasa@austin.org.au> Website: <www.austin.org.au northerncasa=""></www.austin.org.au></ncasa@austin.org.au>	
South Eastern CASA	11 Chester Street, East Bentleigh, 3165	Call: (03) 9928 8741 Email: <secasa@monashhealth.org.au> Website: <www.secasa.com.au></www.secasa.com.au></secasa@monashhealth.org.au>	
West CASA	53 Ballarat Road, Footscray, 3011	Call: (03) 9687 5811 Email: <info@westcasa.org.au> Website: <www.westcasa.org.au></www.westcasa.org.au></info@westcasa.org.au>	

Centres Against Sexual Assault			
Name	Address	Contact details	
Rural CASAs			
Ballarat CASA	Ballarat Health Services, Sebastopol Complex, Corner Vale and Edward Street, Sebastopol, 3353	Call: (03) 5320 3933 Email: <casa@bhs.org.au> Website: <www.casa.org.au ballarat=""></www.casa.org.au></casa@bhs.org.au>	
Barwon CASA	Level 1, 59–63 Spring Street, Geelong West, 3218	Call: (03) 5222 4318 Email: <admin@barwoncasa.org> Website: <www.barwoncasa.org></www.barwoncasa.org></admin@barwoncasa.org>	
Centre Against Violence (Ovens Murray District)	23 Templeton Street, Wangaratta, 3677	Call: (03) 5722 2203 Email: <admin@cav.org.au> Website: <www.centreagainstviolence.org.au></www.centreagainstviolence.org.au></admin@cav.org.au>	
Gippsland CASA	31–41 Buckley Street, Morwell, 3840	Call: (03) 5134 3922 Email: <mail@gippscasa.org> Website: <www.gcasa.org.au></www.gcasa.org.au></mail@gippscasa.org>	
Goulburn Valley CASA	130 Nixon Street, Shepparton, 3630	Call: (03) 5831 2343 Email: <support@gvcasa.org.au> Website: <www.gvcasa.com.au></www.gvcasa.com.au></support@gvcasa.org.au>	
Loddon Campaspe CASA	71 Bridge Street, Bendigo, 3550	Call: (03) 5441 0430 Fax: 5444 6713 Email:  Website: <www. ccasa.org.au=""></www.>	

Centres Against Sexual Assault			
Name	Address	Contact details	
Mallee Sexual Assault Unit	Suites 1and 2, 144–146, Lime Avenue, Mildura, 3500 14-16 McCallum Street, Swan Hill, 3585	Call: (03) 5025 5400 (Mildura) or (03) 5033 1899 (Swan Hill) Email: <info@msau-mdvs.org.au> Website: <www.msau-mdvs.org.au></www.msau-mdvs.org.au></info@msau-mdvs.org.au>	
South Western CASA	299 Koroit Street Warrnambool, 3280	Call: (03) 5564 4144 Email: <casa@swh.net.au> Website: <www.casa.org.au swcasa=""></www.casa.org.au></casa@swh.net.au>	



# Information sheet 10: Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme

#### **Child Safe Standards**

All children and young people have the right to feel safe and to be safe all of the time. To help keep children and young people safe, the Victorian Government has introduced mandatory minimum Child Safe Standards (the Standards) for organisations that provide services or facilities for children and young people.

You can check which types of organisations are in scope of the Standards by visiting the Department of Health and Human Services Child Safe Standards webpage at <a href="http://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards">http://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards</a>>.

The Commission for Children and Young
People, and relevant authorities such as the
Department of Health and Human Services,
play important complementary roles in
overseeing and promoting compliance with the
Standards.

### What can you do if you have concerns or a complaint about child safety?

To be confident that a child or young person in your care is welcome and safe when attending an activity or service, and to help you know what you should see in place and in action, refer to the tip sheet What to look for in a child safe

organisation, available on the Commission for Children and Young People website at <a href="https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/</a>>.

#### You can also:

- Talk to and listen to the child or young person in your care about their experience of feeling safe in the organisation.
- Ask to see an organisation's evidence of compliance with the Standards.
   Organisations that provide services to children and young people should be able to demonstrate how they have implemented the Standards.
- Speak to someone in a leadership role if you believe an organisation could take a stronger approach to child safety.
- Speak with child protection, the department's Safeguarding Regulation Unit, or the Commission for Children and Young People.

For more information, contact the department's Safeguarding Regulation Unit on (03) 9096 6160 or email <childsafeorgs@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

To raise a concern or complaint with the Commission for Children and Young People, call (03) 8601 5281 or email <childsafestandards@ccyp.vic.gov.au>.

### What do organisations have to do to comply with the Child Safe Standards?

To comply with the Standards, an organisation must have:

- strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety through effective leadership arrangements
- 2. a child safe policy (this must be publicly available)
- a code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children and young people (this must be publicly available)
- screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- 5. processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse (this must be publicly available)
- 6. strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- 7. strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children and young people.

Organisations must promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and young people, the cultural safety of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children and young people with a disability.

This will assist organisations to:

- build a culture of child safety and identify, and make child safety everyone's business
- apply a child safety lens to existing and new policies and practice
- set clear expectations for staff in relation to child safety
- recruit child-safe staff and volunteers
- enable staff and volunteers to feel empowered to act in the best interests of children and young people when they have safety concerns
- prevent child abuse, encourage reporting, and improve responses to any allegations of child abuse
- identify and mitigate risks to child safety
- gain valuable information about how children and young people experience its organisation.

### Reportable Conduct Scheme

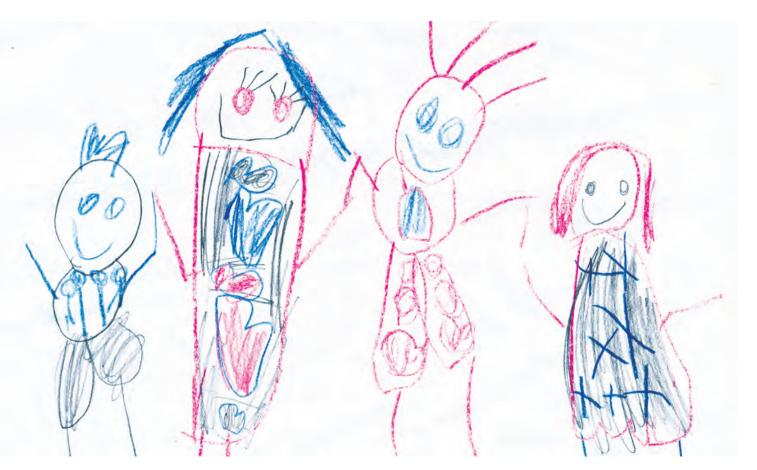
Victoria has a Reportable Conduct Scheme to oversee allegations of child abuse and misconduct.

Concerns about reportable conduct can be made to a Community Service Organisation, the department, or directly to the Commission for Children and Young People. Reports are investigated by the organisation through which the kinship placement is managed.

More detail about the Reportable Conduct Scheme can be found in *Chapter 18*.

### **Useful resources**

- ▶ See Child Safe Standards resources on the department's **Service Providers** website at <a href="http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards">http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards</a>
- ► Contact the department's Safeguarding Regulation Unit on (03) 9096 6160 or email <a href="mailto:childsafeorgs@dhhs.vic.gov.au">childsafeorgs@dhhs.vic.gov.au</a>
- ▶ For more information about the Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme on the Commission for Children and Young People website, call 1300 782 978, email <a href="mailto:</a>
  <childsafe@ccyp.vic.gov.au> or visit <a href="mailto://ccyp.vic.gov.au/">https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/</a>





# Information sheet 11: **Key Contacts**

Below is a brief list of organisations and services that are important contacts for kinship carers and can refer you to other services if needed.

### Independent support and advice

Service	Phone number
Kinship Carers Victoria	(03) 9372 2422
Permanent Care and Adoptive Families	(03) 9020 1833
Mirabel Foundation	(03) 9527 9422
Create Foundation	1800 655 105

### **Centrelink contact numbers**

Service	Phone number
Grandparent advisers	1800 245 965
Australian Immunisation Register enquiries	1800 653 809
Medicare general inquiries	13 20 11
Social work services	13 28 50

### Child protection office contact numbers

Division	Local Government Area	Phone number
North Division	Banyule, Buloke, Darebin, Campaspe, Central Goldfield, Gannawarra, Greater Bendigo, Hume, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, Moreland, Mount Alexander, Nillumbik, Swan Hill, Whittlesea, Yarra.	Preston 1300 664 977 Bendigo (03) 5434 5555 Swan Hill (03) 5032 0100 Mildura (03) 5022 3111
South Division	Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, East Gippsland, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Latrobe, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, South Gippsland, Stonnington, Wellington.	Dandenong 1300 555 526 Cheltenham (03) 8585 6000 Frankston (03) 9784 3100 Leongatha (03) 5662 4311 Morwell (03) 5136 2400 Sale (03) 5144 9100 Bairnsdale (03) 5150 4500 Warragul (03) 5624 0600
East Division	Alpine, Benalla, Boroondara, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Knox, Manningham, Mansfield, Maroondah, Mitchell, Moira, Monash, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta, Whitehorse, Wodonga, Yarra Ranges.	Box Hill (03) 9843 6000 Wangaratta (03) 5722 0555 Wodonga (02) 6055 7777 Seymour (03) 5771 1600 Shepparton (03) 5832 1500
West Division – rural and regional only	Ararat, Ballarat, Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Glenelg, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Hepburn, Hindmarsh, Horsham, Moorabool, Moyne, Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Queenscliffe, Southern Grampians, Surf Coast, Warrnambool West Wimmera, Yarriambiack.	Geelong (03) 5226 4540 Colac (03) 5231 4350 Ballarat (03) 5333 6530 Warrnambool (03) 5561 9444 Portland (03) 5523 9999 Horsham (03) 5381 9777 Hamilton (03) 5551 3299
<b>West Division</b> – metropolitan only	Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley, Wyndham.	Footscray 1300 360 462
After Hours Child Protection Emergency Service (new reports and urgent matters)	State-wide	13 12 78

### Aboriginal kinship care service providers

Agency	Address	Phone number
Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative	109 Lydiard Street North, Ballarat VIC 3353	(03) 5331 5344
Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative	119 Prouses Road, North Bendigo VIC 3550	(03) 5442 4947
Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative	95 Macleod Street, Bairnsdale VIC 3875	(03) 5150 0700
Mallee District Aboriginal Service	120 Madden Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500	Mildura: (03) 5018 4100
	70 Nyah Road, Swan Hill VIC 3585	Swan Hill: (03) 5032 8600
Njernda Aboriginal Cooperative	84 Hare Street, Echuca VIC 3564	(03) 5480 6252
Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative	31 Wyndham Street, Shepparton VIC 3630	(03) 5820 0000
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	Suite 4-6, 108-120 Young Street, Frankston VIC 3199	(03) 8796 0700
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	340 Bell Street, Preston VIC 3072	(03) 9287 8800
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	10 Maroondah Hwy, Ringwood VIC 3134	(03) 9871 9000
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	75 Watton Street, Werribee VIC 3030	(03) 9742 8300
Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative	Lot 3, 33 Mackey Street, North Geelong VIC 3215	(03) 5277 0044
Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation	21 Scott Street, Heywood VIC 3304	(03) 5527 2051

### Kinship care service providers

Agency	Address	Phone number
Anchor Inc	44 Lakeview Drive, Scoresby VIC 3179	(03) 9801 1999
Anglicare Victoria	175-187 Hargreaves St, Bendigo VIC 3550	(03) 5440 1100
Anglicare Victoria	41 Somerville Road, Yarraville VIC 3013	(03) 9396 7400
Anglicare Victoria	7-11 Shipley Road, Box Hill VIC 3128	(03) 9896 6322
Baptcare	3/130 Harvester Road, Sunshine 3020	(03) 9373 3800
Berry Street Victoria	110 Wyndham Street Shepparton VIC 3630	(03) 5822 8100
Berry Street Victoria	37 Elgin Street, Morwell VIC 3840	(03) 5134 5971
Bethany Community Support Inc.	16 Ballarat Road, Hamlyn Heights VIC 3215	(03) 5278 8122
Brophy Family & Youth Services	210 Timor Street, Warrnambool VIC 3280	(03) 5561 8888
Centacare – Diocese of Ballarat Inc.	129 Langtree Avenue, Mildura VIC 3500	(03) 5051 0050
Child and Family Services Ballarat Inc.	115 Lydiard Street North, Ballarat VIC 3350	(03) 5337 3333
Kildonan Uniting Care	648 High Street, Reservoir VIC 3073	(03) 9471 0108
Kildonan Uniting Care	61 Riggall Street, Broadmeadows VIC 3047	(03) 9302 6100
OzChild	Level 1, 47 Princes Highway, Dandenong VIC 3175	(03) 9212 5600
Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania)	Suite 2, 280 Thomas Street, Dandenong VIC 3175	(03) 9794 3000
Upper Murray Family Care	29 Stanley Street, Wodonga VIC 3690	(02) 6055 8000
Wimmera Uniting Care	185 Baillie Street, Horsham VIC 3400	(03) 5382 6789

### **My Contacts**

Name	Role or relationship	Contact details

Name	Role or relationship	Contact details

