

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 0499 969 234 or by email: admin@kinshipcarersvictoria.org.

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 0499 969 234 for information about a support group in your area.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) 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.

The information contained in this factsheet is based primarily on information from the Manual for Kinship Carers, published by the former Department of Human Services (now Department of Families, Fairness & Housing) in 2017.

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 <https://create.org.au/>

Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV) – to contact Victoria's peak body for kinship carers, call 0499 969 234, email admin@kinshipcarersvictoria.org or visit <https://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/>

Kinship carer wellbeing podcasts (KCV) – series of podcasts dedicated to kinship carer self-care and wellbeing
<https://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/listen-download-podcasts/>

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 mirabel@mirabelfoundation.org.au or visit <https://www.mirabelfoundation.org.au/>

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families – call (03) 9020 1833, email info@pcafamilies.org.au or visit <https://www.pcafamilies.org.au/>

Victorian Aboriginal kinship care and kinship care service providers on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-kinship-care-service-providers-word>