

Foster and Kinship Carer Orientation and Responsibility Guidelines

A guideline for Foster and Kinship Care Agencies

1. Introduction

The purpose of the *Foster and Kinship Carer Orientation and Responsibility Guidelines* is to support a consistent approach of Foster and Kinship Care agencies to:

- Orientate potential and new carers to understand their regulated out of home care responsibilities.
- Provide ongoing support to approved carers to meet their regulated out of home care responsibilities.

These guidelines support foster and kinship care agencies meet service delivery requirements for Foster and Kinship Care Services (T204) and Intensive Foster Care (T205) service types outlined in the Child Protection (Placement Services) Investment Specification and Connecting Kin (T210), Equipping Kin (T211) and Supporting Kin (T212) service types outlined in the Family Based Care (Kinship Care) Investment Specification.

The guidelines outline responsibilities for all approved foster carers, approved kinship carers and provisionally approved carers (carers). The guidelines are also to be used when discussing care responsibilities with persons considering or having made an application to be assessed.

2. Foster and Kinship Carer Responsibilities

Decision Making

The most frequent responsibility a carer will undertake is making day-to-day care decisions for a child in their care.

Foster and kinship care agency staff will ensure carers are aware of the decisions they can make and when a decision will require approval from Child Safety.

The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (Child Safety), support approved cares to make everyday care decisions. While it is not possible to make a complete list of these decisions, they may include:

- daily routine decisions, such as meals and nutrition, homework, bath and bedtime routines
- expectations relating to household functioning, such as keeping rooms tidy, TV and computer usage
- the child's appearance, such as clothing, grooming and hygiene
- variations to school routine
- responding to calls from the child's school, child care etc.
- daily travel arrangements, such as to and from school
- occasional babysitting arrangements
- providing pocket money, consistent with carer family practices
- accompanying carers on outings and social events, when not in conflict with pre-planned family contact
- responding to invitations for the child to visit friends, such as after school and weekends.

Some decisions can only be made by the child's legal guardian, such as deciding to enrol a child in new school. A child's legal guardian may be the child's parent, the chief executive of the Department or the child's carer depending upon the type of child protection intervention. This

requires foster and kinship care agency staff to be aware of the order type under which a child is placed with a carer/s and to amend support accordingly.

Information about decision making for carers is discussed in the [Connecting with Carers](#) web page (Everyday caring / Decision making) and the [Child Safety Practice Manual](#) (Support a child in care / decision making for a child).

Information about some decision-making responsibility is also included in each carers' Authority to Care documentation, provided for every child in their care. When the child or young persons is subject to guardianship to the chief executive, the carer's Authority to Care will explain they may consent for immunisation, and blood tests requested by a medical practitioner (but excluding decisions about approval of DNA testing of a child).

Foster and kinship care agency staff may undertake refresher training and conduct one-on-one training with carers based on the [getting ready to start](#) module three: 'Early days in a placement', that covers decision making responsibilities applicable to all carers.

Reporting critical and major incidents

Carers may be the first person to be aware of a critical or major incident involving or impacting on a child in care. Carers are to report such incidents and foster and kinship care agencies are responsible for ensuring carers understand how to report, the required timeframes for reporting and supporting them to report when requested by the carer.

In emergencies carers must not hesitate to **dial 000** (triple zero).

Carers must report incidents to Child Safety. Carers are to contact their child safety service centre during business hours, or if after hours, they are to contact the child safety after hours service on 1800 177 135. Carers may also contact their foster and kinship care agency for support in such circumstances agencies will provide support that ensure Child Safety is made aware of critical instances within the required timeframes.

A list of category 1 critical incidents and category 2 major incidents are published on the [Connecting with carers](#) web page (Carer's responsibilities / critical and major incidents).

Category 1 critical Incidents must be reported by carers immediately to Child Safety, or as soon as practical given the circumstances.

Category 2 major incidents must be reported by carers immediately to Child Safety, as soon as possible or at least by the next business day of the carer becoming aware of the incident.

Carers are required to know how to respond when a child in their care is absent or missing. Specific responsibility and steps for carers to follow are outlined on the [Connecting with carers](#) webpage (Carer's responsibilities / critical and major incidents).

There may be other incidents of significant concern that will warrant timely reporting and discussion by carers with their Child Safety Officer or foster and kinship care agency support worker. Foster and kinship care agencies will work with carers to raise any other incidents of significant concern.

Mandatory reporting by foster and kinship carers

Foster and kinship carers are mandated by law to report a reasonable suspicion that a child in care has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering, significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse.

Foster and kinship care agencies will support carers to be aware of this mandatory reporting obligation and how to respond should they form a reasonable suspicion.

Foster and kinship care agencies will assist carers to report a reasonable suspicion about a child in care as soon as possible to Child Safety. Reports should be made to:

- the Child Safety Officer (CSO) with case responsibility for the child; or
- the Regional Intake Service (RIS) in their area if the CSO is unknown; or
- the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre if outside business hours.

Standards of care

All foster and kinship carers are required to provide care consistent with the statement of standards as outlined in section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

Foster and kinship care agencies will work with carers to ensure they understand and apply these standards in their day-to-day care of children and young people.

Introduction to the statement of standards is provided in the [getting ready to start training](#) all foster carers complete. How a carer meets the statement of standards is also covered within their initial assessment, including any provisional assessment. Foster and kinship care agencies are responsible for monitoring and supporting all carers to meet and understand these standards on an ongoing basis outside of assessments and formal training and should be included in regular discussions with carers.

Consistent with the [Foster Carer Training Guidelines](#), foster and kinship care agencies have a responsibility to support both kinship and foster carers to identify and access continuous learning opportunities and this includes any ongoing support needed to support statement of standards being met in a carer household.

Foster and kinship care agencies will also work with carers so they understand how these standards may be investigated including through a standard of care review care or harm report.

Foster and kinship care agencies will refer to the [respond to concerns about a child's care arrangement](#) key step in the Child Safety Practice Manual. Information for carers about the standards of care is provided on the [Connecting with Carers](#) webpage (Rights and responsibility / Standards of care).

Recordkeeping

Foster and kinship care agencies will ensure carers are aware of and comply with record keeping obligations and support them in their role by sharing information with them when it relates to the carer arrangements and responsibilities they hold.

Carers have an obligation to keep clear and accurate records of matters relating to the children in their care.

This includes information that provides evidence of important decisions made or actions taken for the child in their care. This may be information received by the carer or information carers have created consistent with their authority to care.

This information may be used in the development of Child Safety case plans, in court proceedings or to inform decisions relating to the child; or the information collected may be included as part of the child's life diary.

Carers must keep child protection information secure and ensure that people who do not have a legitimate need to know the information cannot access it.

Hard copy records (e.g., report cards, health passport, letters from Child Safety) should be stored in a locked drawer or filing cabinet. Electronic records, including emails and diary notes, should be stored in a password protected folder on your computer that no one else can access.

When carers cease caring for a child, their belongings (including hard copy and electronic records, such as the child's health passport, education support plan, report cards, photos, the child's life diary, cultural support plan) must be returned to Child Safety and/or provided to the young person.

Privacy and confidentiality

Carers have obligations to respect the privacy of the children in their care and foster and kinship care agencies will ensure carers are aware of and comply with privacy and confidentiality provisions.

Disclosing information about the child's family situation may cause negative social or emotional consequences for a child in care, particularly if that information is widely disseminated (for example, on social media—such as Facebook).

Carers should only use or disclose child protection information to the extent necessary to support the agreed case plan/placement agreement or to meet the immediate needs of the child.

For example:

- a carer may tell the child's teacher that the child has been placed in their care due to domestic violence issues within their family, so that the teacher understands the particular issues affecting the child which may impact on their ability to learn or the supports that they may require at school.
- a carer may tell the child's doctor or counsellor about trauma they have suffered in order to obtain appropriate medical treatment or counselling that addresses their needs.

A carer should not disclose information about a child's family situation merely to satisfy the curiosity of their family and friends.

Unauthorised use or disclosure of child protection information is an offence and may be punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

If carers are unsure whether to use or disclose particular information and foster and kinship care agencies are unable to resolve, individual queries should be referred to the child's Child Safety Officer.

Use of social media

Carers must take particular care to ensure they do not publish information that would identify a child in care, especially when using social media. For example a carer may post a photo on their Facebook page of the child with their family on a social outing, but carers must not include a comment that refers to them as a child in care.

Foster and kinship care agencies will support carers using social media by providing them with and a copy of the [Social media guidelines](#) detailed on the *Connecting with Carers* webpage and ensure they understand these guideline requirements.

Change in Carer Circumstance

The Child Protection Act 1999 requires approved carers tell Child Safety of changes in their circumstances in writing. Approved carers can do this by completing a [Change in Carer Circumstance Form 39](#) and providing this form to their child safety service centre.

Foster and kinship care agencies will support carers to be aware of when to complete the Change in Carer Circumstance Form 39, support them to access, complete and provide the form to their child safety service centre when required.

Carers must tell Child Safety immediately when:

- there is a change in their criminal or traffic history, including if they have been charged with an offence
- they become aware of, or reasonably suspect, there has been a change in the criminal or traffic history of a member of their household
- they, or a household member, is mentioned as an aggrieved or respondent in a domestic and family violence matter
- they become aware of, or reasonably suspect, a household member has been involved with Child Safety or a similar child protection agency in another state or country
- when another person intends to join the carer household—this includes commencing a new relationship with a partner, or if the change relates to a tenant or boarder, a friend or relative
- when another person leaves the carer household—for example, as a result of separation or divorce, or a household member dies
- if they intend to provide care to other children in their home, for example as a family day care educator or through the provision of informal care of children
- there is a change in their personal circumstances, for example, significant health problems or excessive employment demands
- they change their residential address.

It is important Child Safety knows who is living in a carer's household or who is regularly spending time in the carer's home. A condition of a carer's approval is the requirement to provide this information to Child Safety. If Child Safety determine that this person is considered an "adult household member" under the *Child Protection Act 1999*, this person must hold a current blue card or exemption card approval.

Blue Card Requirements

Foster and kinship care agencies must ensure carers (and any adult household members) have a valid blue card consistent with requirements of the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000*.

Foster and Kinship Care agencies will assist carers and all adult members of the carer's household throughout the blue card application and renewal process.

Provisionally approved carers and adult members of their household are required to apply and obtain a blue card approval prior to their provisional approval expiring.

Neither the *Child Protection Act 1999* or the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* requires provisionally approved carers or members of their household to hold a blue card to commence caring when provisionally approved.

Carers can apply for blue cards through Blue Card Services' online applicant portal which will mean faster approval times for most applicants.

The carer application form requires applicants to include either their blue card number, should they already hold a blue card, or to have commenced a blue card application process and provide their blue card services application number.

The blue card services application number will be used by Child Safety to link the applicant and allow them to continue to complete their blue card application as a volunteer (at no cost). Once linked, applicants will receive an email or text message from Blue Card Services advising them to access the online application portal to complete their application. Foster and kinship care agencies will support all carer applicants and household members to complete this step as early as possible. Foster and kinship care agencies can refer to the ['Supporting your applicants to apply online'](#) resource for more information.

Foster and kinship care agencies can utilise the [consent to discuss information form](#) to obtain consent from applicants and adult household members to support their blue card application, renewal process or to respond to requests for additional information made by Blue Card Services. When completed, this form authorises Blue Card Services to discuss information about the applicant's blue card application with the nominated person.

Carers must renew their blue card through Blue Card Services' online portal prior to their current blue card approval expiry date. Applicants generally receive a fast re-approval when submitting through the online portal.

Carers can renew via paper-based applications; however, the use of the online portal is strongly encouraged, and foster and kinship care agencies are encouraged to support carers make renewals on time and easily through Blue Card Services' online portal.

Foster and kinship care agencies will ensure carers and adult household members are aware of how and when to renew their blue card. Foster and kinship care agencies will access the blue card portal to manage the timely renewal of blue cards for carers and adult household members, including supporting all young people within the household to have lodged a blue card application before their 18th birthday.

Household Safety

A [Household Safety Study](#) is undertaken as part of carer approval and renewal process. The only time a household safety study is not undertaken as part of a carer approval is when the carer is already approved as a kinship carer and they are being assessed as part of another relative being placed in their care.

Foster and kinship care agencies undertaking a carer assessment will be responsible for completing the Household Safety Study. Regardless of whether the agency was responsible for the carers' last assessment or Household Safety Study, foster and kinship care agencies will ensure carers remain aware of and support them to maintain household safety standards, for example pool gates close securely.

Foster and kinship care agencies will support carers to notify Child Safety of any changes relevant to their household safety, including via the [Change in Carer Circumstance Form](#) when there is a change in the carer's residential address.

Carer renewal applications

Carers are responsible for completing their renewal application and will be supported to do so by their foster and kinship care agency. An approved foster or kinship carer is required to renew their approval 1 year from the date of their initial approval and every three years after that.

Foster and kinship care agencies will assist carers to complete their renewal prior to their current certificate expiring by accessing the *Carer Renewal Application Form*.

3. Tools and resources to help carers

Connecting with carer Webpage

Child Safety provides information for existing foster and kinship carers through the [Connecting with carers webpage](#).

The webpage is designed for all approved carers and provides up-to-date information about

- Their rights and responsibilities
- What to do before a child or young person enters their care, early days of care arrangement, case plan and placement agreement and keeping track of a child's life story.
- How to attend to the everyday caring
- Financial support available to foster and kinship carers.
- Decision making

Carer Connect

Carer Connect is a web and mobile friendly app that has been developed to provide carers with improved and secure access to information and support, when and where they need it. Ongoing enhancements to the app are based on feedback received and updates are developed and released regularly.

Carers who have children and young people staying with them as a primary and/or short break care arrangement can view relevant information and documentation to gain an understanding of how the needs of the children in their care can best be supported.

Information available may include:

- Placement agreement and Authority to Care
- medical information, e.g., serious health condition alert, health passport and immunisations
- Child Safety contact information, including after-hours phone number
- type of child protection order and expiry date
- cultural information
- current education information.

In addition to viewing child and carer entity information, carers can:

- upload pictures of their home and family that can be shown to children when they are transitioning to a new care arrangement
- view noticeboard articles that announce everything from training and social events to legislation changes.
- make contributions to the life story for children and young people, that is then recorded and made available to children and young people via the [kicbox application](#).
- view and build children and young people's "Who am I" profile – valuable information about their likes, dislikes, strengths and their routine
- submit claims for Child Related Costs reimbursements for children and young people currently in their care and which have been pre-approved by Child Safety.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Foster and kinship care agencies are responsible for ensuring that potential and approved carers are aware of obligations attached to a carer approval so they can make an informed decision when considering becoming a foster or kinship carer and they are supported to meet those obligations when approved.

Child Safety supports awareness of carer obligations through updating getting ready to start mandatory training for foster carers and content included on the *Connecting with Carers* web page.

Foster and kinship care agencies may develop additional material to support carer orientation and ongoing support that assists carer to understand and meet their obligations and responsibilities.

5. Evaluation of Guidelines

The guidelines are designed to support Foster and kinship carer agencies.

Feedback on the guideline's contents from Foster and kinship carer agencies can be emailed to familybasedcarerandsupportmaibox@cyjma.qld.gov

The content and structure of guidelines will be periodically reviewed and updated based on changes to legislation, policy and practice as well as feedback received. Updates are subject to Child Safety approval processes.

6. Links

6.1 Related legislation or standards

Child Protection Act 1999

Child Protection Regulations

6.2 Related Child Safety procedure

[Child Safety Practice Manual](#)

6.3 Guidelines

[Social media guidelines](#)

[Foster Carer Training Guidelines](#)

[Connecting with carers webpage](#)

6.4 Key Forms

[Application for initial carer assessment form](#)

[Application for carer renewal form](#)

[Addendum for additional household member form](#)

[Household Safety Study form](#)

[New Adult Household Member form](#)

[Change in Carer Circumstance form](#)

(Blue Card Services)

[Authority to liaise with an authorised person form](#)