



# Foster and Kinship Carer Orientation and Responsibility Guidelines

A guideline for Foster and Kinship Care  
Agencies



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# 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 (Agency) 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 agencies meet service delivery requirements for: -

- Foster and Kinship Care (T204) and Intensive Foster Care (T205) service types outlined in the Child Protection (Placement Services) Investment Specification
- Connecting Kin (T210), Equipping Kin (T211), Supporting Kin (T212), Foster Care Recruitment (T213), Supporting Foster Care (T214) and Specialist Family Based Care (T215) service types outlined in the Family Based 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.

## Carer Responsibility

### Decision Making

The most frequent responsibility a carer will undertake is making day-to-day care decisions for a child or young person in their 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 Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (Child Safety), support approved carers 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 a new school. A child's legal guardian may be the child's parent, the Chief Executive of Child Safety or the child's carer depending upon the type of child protection intervention. This requires 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 person 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).

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 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 (CSSC) during business hours, or if after hours, they are to contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on 1800 177 135. Carers may also contact their agency for support and the agency will 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 [Rights and 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 [Rights and 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 (CSO) or agency support worker. Agencies will work with carers to raise any other incidents of significant concern.

## Mandatory reporting by foster and kinship carers

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.

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

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

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. 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](#), agencies have a responsibility to support carers to identify and access continuous learning opportunities and this includes any ongoing support needed to support the Statement of Standards being met in a carer household.

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.

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

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 child or young person.

## Privacy and confidentiality

Carers have obligations to respect the privacy of the children in their care and 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 agencies are unable to resolve, individual queries should be referred to the child's CSO.



## Use of social media

Carers must 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.

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

## Change in Carer Circumstance

The *Child Protection Act 1999* requires approved carers to 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 Child Safety via their regional placement services.

Agencies will support carers to be aware of when to complete the Change in Carer Circumstance Form. This may include supporting carers to access, complete the form and providing this form to Child Safety when requested by the carer. Agencies will confirm updates about changes to a carer household are received by Child Safety in a timely way.

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
- 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
- another person leaves the carer household—for example, as a result of separation or divorce, or a household member dies
- 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

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*.

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 the Blue Card Services' (BCS) online applicant portal which will mean faster approval times for most applicants.

The [Application for Initial Approval – Form 3A](#) 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 online number.

The BCS online 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 BCS advising them to access the online application portal to complete their application. Agencies will support all carer applicants and household members to complete this step as early as possible. Agencies can refer to the [Blue Card Services resources for organisations](#) page for more information.

Agencies can utilise the [Approval to contact Blue Card Services](#) and/or [Approval to Discuss confidential information with Blue Card Services](#) 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 BCS. When completed, this form authorises BCS to discuss information about the applicant's blue card application with the nominated person.

Carers must renew their blue card through BCS' 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. Agencies are encouraged to support carers make renewals on time and easily through BCS' online portal.

Agencies will ensure carers and adult household members are aware of how and when to renew their blue card.

## 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.



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, agencies will ensure carers remain aware of and support them to maintain household safety standards, for example pool gates close securely.

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 agency. An approved carer is required to renew their approval one year from the date of their initial approval and every three years after that.

Agencies will assist carers to complete their renewal application prior to their current certificate expiring by accessing the [Application for Renewal of Approval – Form 3B](#). Agencies with service delivery responsibility for submitting carer renewal assessments should ensure assessments are completed and submitted to Child Safety prior to the carer's original certificate expiry date.

## Resources to help carers

### Connecting with carers Webpage

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

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

- Their rights and responsibilities
- When a child comes into your care
- Kinship Care
- Everyday caring
- Money matters
- Where to get help
- Training
- Carer Connect.

### 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 approval 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
- complete and submit their Application for Renewal of Approval – Form 3B through the Carer Connect app.

## Roles and responsibilities

Consistent with the scope of their funded services, 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 webpage.

Agencies may develop additional material to support carer orientation and ongoing support that assists the carer to understand and meet their obligations and responsibilities.

## Evaluation of Guidelines

The guidelines are designed to support agencies.

Feedback on the guideline's content from Foster and kinship carer agencies can be emailed to [FamilyBasedCareandSupportMailbox@cyjma.qld.gov.au](mailto:FamilyBasedCareandSupportMailbox@cyjma.qld.gov.au)

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.