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Caregiver parenting practices and children's relationships

John De Maio and Diana Smart, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Children in out-of-home care (OOHC) have two sets of relationships that are likely to have a crucial influence on their adjustment and wellbeing: their relationship with caregivers and with their birth parents and extended families. The quality of these relationships, and also children's relationships with their siblings and with other children living in the caregiver's household, are also very important contributors to children's reported happiness and adjustment as well as the stability of their placement (Buist & Vermande, 2014; Pike, Coldwell & Dunn, 2005; Schofield, Beek & Ward, 2012; Stacks & Partridge, 2011; Volling, 2003). Thus aspects of parenting and children's relationships with carers, birth family, siblings and peers are assessed in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS).

The data in this chapter describe the current caregiver's and child's perceptions of parenting practices as well as their views on the child's relationships with members of their caregiving family, birth family and peers. The type and frequency of the child's contact with their birth family and other relatives are also explored. This chapter examines elements of the POCLS Key Research Question 8: *'What are the placement characteristics and placement stability of the children and how do these influence their outcomes?'* and Key Research Question 11: *'How does contact between the children in OOHC and their birth parents, siblings, and/or extended family influence their outcomes?'*¹.

¹ Please see Chapter 2 for a description of the data analysis undertaken in this report.

7.1 Caregiver parenting practices

Caregivers' perceptions

Four key aspects of parenting practices are measured in the POCLS:

- **Warmth** – includes caregivers' affection, emotional availability and involvement for children aged 9 months to 17 years.
- **Hostility** – includes caregivers' punitiveness, physical punishment and anger for children aged 9 months to 17 years.
- **Monitoring** – including caregivers' knowledge and oversight of the child's activities for children aged 10 to 17 years.
- **Self-efficacy in managing difficult behaviour** – includes caregivers' confidence when dealing with challenging behaviours for children aged 2 to 17 years.

Caregivers were asked to report on their own parenting practices across these four aspects in the Wave 1 interview². The set of items comprising the *warmth*, *hostility*, *monitoring* and *difficult behaviour self-efficacy* scales were each added up, yielding four total scores (one for each measure).

Overall, caregivers tended to show high levels of warmth, with a mean score across all caregivers of 17.9 (Table 7.1). This is towards the high end of the possible range from four (low warmth) to 20 (high warmth), and suggests that caregivers 'often' to 'almost always' showed warmth in their interactions with the child (as the mean was equivalent to a score between four and five on each item).

Overall, caregivers tended to show low levels of hostility (mean=6.1). This mean score is well below the mid-point of the range from three (low hostility) to 30 (high hostility) and equates to a response of two to each item.

Overall, caregivers tended to show high levels of monitoring of children's activities, with a mean score for caregivers on the monitoring scale of 18.0. The monitoring total score could range from four, indicating low parental monitoring, to 20, indicating high monitoring. This score is consistent with young people's reports where 80% of young people reported that caregivers 'always' or 'often' knew where the young person went when going out (see next section).

² Four scales were selected to measure aspects of parenting for the POCLS:

Warmth Scale captures the degree of warm and positive parenting displayed by caregivers (Paterson & Sanson, 1999). It consists of four items (e.g., how often do you enjoy listening to and doing things with the child), with responses of 1 = 'never/almost never', 2 = 'rarely', 3 = 'sometimes', 4 = 'often', and 5 = 'always/almost always' provided.

Hostility Scale (Institut de la Statistique du Quebec, 2000) captures aspects of harsh parenting/discipline. Caregivers responded to three items (e.g., thinking about the last four weeks, how often have you been angry with the child), with responses ranging from 1 ('not at all') to 10 ('all the time').

Monitoring Scale measures caregivers' level of knowledge of the activities of young people. The scale comprises four items (e.g., how often do you know who [study child] is with when he/she is away from home, i.e., his/her placement). Caregivers could respond 5 = 'always', 4 = 'mostly', 3 = 'sometimes', 2 = 'rarely' or 1 = 'never' for each item.

Difficult Behaviour Self-efficacy Scale (DBSES; Hastings & Brown, 2002), measures caregivers' degree of self-efficacy when dealing with challenging child behaviours by using three of the five items comprising this scale (e.g., how confident are you in dealing with the challenging behaviours of the child), with responses scored from 1–7, where 1 = 'not at all confident' to 7 = 'very confident'.

Overall, caregivers showed high levels of self-efficacy in managing difficult behaviour with a mean score of 17.7 across the range of three (lower levels of self-efficacy) to 21 (higher levels of self-efficacy).

Caregivers differed significantly³ on reported warmth, according to the age of the children in their care, with caregivers of younger children showing more warmth than caregivers of older children (Table 7.1). Similarly, there were significant differences in reported hostility. Caregivers of the youngest group of children (9–35 months olds) were significantly lower on hostility than caregivers of older age groups. Caregivers of 10–11 year old children showed significantly higher levels of monitoring than caregivers of 12–17 year olds⁴. On self-efficacy in managing difficult behaviour, caregivers of 12–17 year olds showed significantly lower levels than caregivers of those aged 9–35 months and 3–5 years while caregivers of 6–11 year olds showed significantly lower levels than caregivers of those aged 9–35 months.

Table 7.1: Caregiver reports on aspects of their own parenting, by child age

	9–35 months	3–5 years	6–11 years	12–17 years	All ages
	Mean (95% CIs)	Mean (95% CIs)	Mean (95% CIs)	Mean (95% CIs)	Mean (95% CIs)
Warmth	18.9 (18.8, 19.0)	18.0 (17.8, 18.3)	16.9 (16.6, 17.2)	15.5 (14.9, 16.0)	17.9 (17.7, 18.0)
Total	567	265	329	124	1,285
Hostility	5.0 (4.7, 5.2)	6.9 (6.4, 7.4)	7.2 (6.7, 7.6)	6.5 (5.9, 7.2)	6.1 (5.9, 6.3)
Total	567	265	328	123	1,283
Monitoring ¹	-		19.0 (18.8, 19.3)	17.2 (16.7, 17.7)	18.0 (17.6, 18.3)
Total	-	-	85	124	209
Difficult Behaviour Self-efficacy Scale ²	18.4 (18.0, 18.8)	18.0 (17.6, 18.4)	17.4 (17.0, 17.8)	16.7 (16.1, 17.4)	17.7 (17.5, 17.9)
Total	176	265	329	124	894

1 Totals were smaller for the monitoring scale as this was only used with caregivers of children aged 10–17 years.

2 Totals were smaller for the DBSES scale as this was only used with caregivers of children aged 2–17 years.

There was little difference in reported parenting practices between foster carers and relative/kinship carers (Table 7.2). However, residential care workers were significantly lower than both foster carers and relative/kinship carers on warmth, hostility and monitoring. Age differences across placement types may explain much of this difference, as children in residential care tend to be older than those in foster care or relative/kinship care. Additionally, residential care workers may have a different type of relationship with children than foster or relative/kinship carers.

³ A non-overlap in confidence intervals indicates that there were significant differences between groups.

⁴ The monitoring items were asked only in relation to children aged 10 years and above. Hence the age band here is 10–11 years rather than 6–11 years.

Table 7.2: Caregiver reports on aspects of their own parenting, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	Mean	95% CIs	Mean	95% CIs	Mean	95% CIs
Warmth	17.9	17.7, 18.1	17.9	17.7, 18.2	15.5	14.5, 16.4
Total	661		598		26	
Hostility	6.1	5.8, 6.4	6.1	5.8, 6.4	4.6	3.7, 5.6
Total	661		597		25	
Monitoring ¹	18.4	18.1, 18.8	18.3	17.6, 18.7	15.2	13.9, 16.6
Total	84		99		26	
Difficult Behaviour Self-efficacy Scale ²	17.6	17.3, 17.9	17.8	17.4, 18.1	17.2	16.1, 18.2
Total	435		433		26	

1 Totals were smaller for the monitoring scale as this was only used with caregivers of children aged 10 to 17 years.

2 Totals were smaller for the DBSES scale as this was only used with caregivers of children aged 2 to 17 years.

Children's perceptions

Overall, children had positive views of their caregivers' parenting with most children aged 7–11 years and children aged 12–17 years reporting that the adult who looked after them 'always' helped them if they had a problem (72%); 'always' listened to them (68–73%); and 'always' praised them for doing well (65–71%). Fewer children said the adults looking after them did things with them that were just for fun (51% of 7–11 years; 46% of 12–17 years) or that caregivers 'always' spent time just talking with them (30% of 7–11 years; 40% of 12–17 years). Generally, there appeared to be little difference in the pattern of responses between children aged 7–11 years and those aged 12–17 years (Tables 7.3 and 7.4).

Approximately three quarters of children aged 12–17 years said that caregivers 'always' or 'often' knew what they did with their free time, whereas only 12% of these children reported that their caregivers 'rarely' or 'never' knew. Similarly, 80% of children aged 12–17 years said caregivers 'always' or 'often' knew where they went when going out, while 13% of caregivers were reported to 'never' or 'rarely' know (Table 7.4).

Table 7.3: Child aged 7–11 years reports on aspects of the caregivers' parenting¹

Thinking about the adults who look after you, how often do they:	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help you if you have a problem (n=226)	163	72.1	31	13.7	27	11.9	3	1.3	2	0.9
Listen to you (n=225)	153	68.0	36	16.0	29	12.9	4	1.8	3	1.3
Praise you for doing well (n=224)	146	65.2	34	15.2	36	16.1	4	1.8	4	1.8
Do things with you that are just for fun (n=226)	116	51.3	44	19.5	50	22.1	10	4.4	6	2.7
Spend time just talking with you (n= 221)	66	29.9	59	26.7	78	35.3	13	5.9	5	2.3

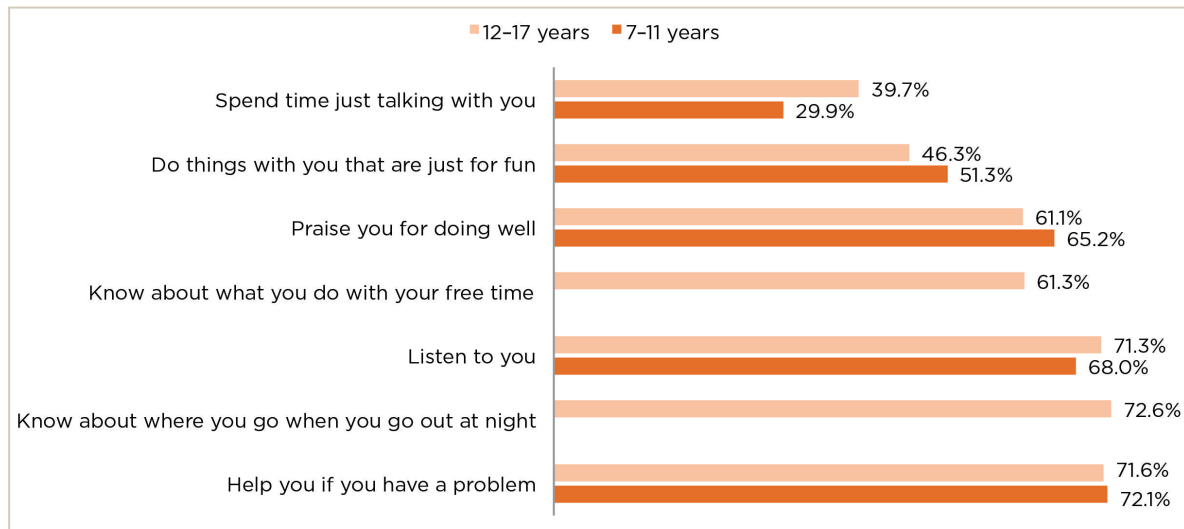
¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as adults may do more than one of these things. A small number of children chose not to answer the questions (missing data range: n=3–7).

Table 7.4: Children aged 12–17 years reports on aspects of the caregivers' parenting¹

Thinking about the adults who look after you, how often do they:	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Help you if you have a problem (n=95)	68	71.6	17	17.9	5	5.3	5	5.3	0	0.0
Know about where you go when you go out at night (n=84)	61	72.6	6	7.1	6	7.1	3	3.6	8	9.5
Listen to you (n=94)	67	71.3	11	11.7	12	12.8	4	4.3	0	0.0
Know about what you do with your free time (n=93)	57	61.3	13	14.0	12	12.9	2	2.2	9	9.7
Praise you for doing well (n=95)	58	61.1	21	22.1	9	9.5	5	5.3	2	2.1
Do things with you that are just for fun (n=95)	44	46.3	18	18.9	23	24.2	9	9.5	1	1.1
Spend time just talking with you (n=93)	36	39.7	26	28.0	21	22.6	9	9.7	1	1.1

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as adults may do more than one of these things. Some children chose not to answer the questions (missing data range: n=4–15).

Figure 7.1: Children aged 7 to 17 years reports who reported ‘always’ on aspects of caregivers’ parenting, by child age¹



¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as adults may do more than one of these things. Some children chose not to answer the questions (missing data range: n=3–15).

7.2 Children’s relationships with members of the caregiving household

Most caregivers (84%) thought they knew the study child ‘very well’, and a further 15% answered ‘fairly well’ (Table 7.5)⁵. Only 1% of caregivers reported knowing the study child ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all’ well. Caregivers of younger children more often reported that they knew the child well (e.g., 96% of caregivers of children aged 9–35 months) (compared to 61% of caregivers of 12–17 year olds).

The great majority of caregivers reported having either a ‘very close’ (78%) or ‘quite close’ (20%) relationship with the study child. There were age variations, with caregivers of younger children more often reporting feeling ‘very close’ to the child than caregivers of older children. This difference was most evident when comparing caregivers of children aged 9–35 months (95%) with those of children aged 12–17 years (48%).

Similarly, most caregivers reported either a ‘very close’ (72%) or ‘quite close’ (23%) relationship between the study child and other children in the household. Caregivers reported that over half of children aged 9 months to 11 years (56% to 90%) had a ‘very close’ relationship with other children in the household. This contrasts with findings for the oldest age group where caregivers reported just over one-third of 12–17 year olds (35%) had a ‘very close’ relationship with other children in the household.

⁵ As described in Section 4, the most common length of time the POCLS children had been residing in their current placement at the time of the Wave 1 interview was 12–17 months. The most prevalent length of time children aged 9–35 months had been in their current placement at the Wave 1 interview was 6–11 months (38%) compared with 12–17 year olds which was 18 months or longer (42%).

Table 7.5: Caregiver reports of study child-caregiver household relationships, by child age¹

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		All children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well carers knew the child										
Very well	545	96.1	222	83.8	242	73.6	76	61.3	1085	84.4
Fairly well	22	3.9	41	15.5	81	24.6	44	35.5	188	14.6
Not very well	0	0.0	2	0.8	5	1.5	3	2.4	10	0.8
Not at all well	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	1	0.8	2	0.2
Total	567		265		329		124		1,285	
Carer's relationship with the child										
Very close	540	95.2	196	74.2	209	63.9	59	48.0	1004	78.4
Quite close	26	4.6	67	25.4	110	33.6	54	43.9	257	20.1
Not very close	1	0.2	1	0.4	8	2.4	10	8.1	20	1.6
Total	567		264		327		123		1,281	
Child's relationship with other children in household										
Very close	431	90.0	171	71.3	162	56.4	34	35.4	798	72.4
Quite close	47	9.8	61	25.4	102	35.5	42	43.8	252	22.9
Not very close	1	0.2	8	3.3	23	8.0	20	20.8	52	4.7
Total	479		240		287		96		1,102	

1 Most caregivers interviewed were female (n=790; 91%).

There appear to be some differences across placement type in caregiver-child relationships (Table 7.6). A much higher proportion of relative/kinship carers (82%) and foster carers (76%) reported 'very close' relationships with the study child compared with residential care workers (39%). The same trend was apparent for the study child's relationship with other children in the household or residential facility (76% for relative/kinship care, 71% for foster care and 14% for residential care). This is not surprising given the different placement models. Again, the majority of relative/kinship carers (88%) and foster carers (82%) were more likely to feel that they knew the child 'very well' while fewer residential care workers felt they knew the child 'very well' (62%).

Table 7.6: Caregiver reports of study child-caregiver household relationships, by placement type¹

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well carers knew the child						
Very well	544	82.3	525	87.8	16	61.5
Fairly well	113	17.1	67	11.2	8	30.8
Not very well	3	0.5	5	0.8	2	7.7
Not at all well	1	0.2	1	0.2	0	0
Total	661		598		26	
Carer's relationship with child						
Very close	502	76.4	492	82.3	10	38.5
Quite close	145	22.1	97	16.2	15	57.7
Not very close	10	1.5	9	1.5	1	3.9
Total	657		598		26	
Child's relationship with other children in household						
Very close	419	71.4	376	76.3	3	13.6
Quite close	139	23.7	103	20.9	10	45.5
Not very close	29	4.9	14	2.8	9	40.9
Total	587		493		22	

¹ Most carers interviewed were female (n=790; 91%).

7.3 Children's relationships with their peers

Peer relationships can be strong influences on children and can affect their wellbeing (e.g., Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Bowker & McDonald, 2011; Sturaro, van Lier, Cuijpers & Koot, 2011); development of prosocial skills (Rubin et al, 2011); and school adjustment (Boulton, Don & Boulton, 2011; Ryan, 2012). Research on children's peer relationships generally focuses on two elements. Firstly, in relation to children's friendships, researchers generally look at the existence of a close friendship, the number of close friends a child has, the quality of these relationships, as well as the support provided by friends (Schneider, 2000). The second area of research examines how children are getting on with others in their broader peer group, focusing on aspects such as peer acceptance, rejection, and sociometric status, which is the degree to which children are liked or disliked by their peers (Schneider, 2000).

For the POCLS at Wave 1, the focus is on children's friendships, although there are also some measures of how the child interacts with their peers relative to other children. Caregivers of children aged 6 to 17 years were asked a series of questions about the study child's friendships and to rate how well the child got along with siblings, caregivers, and other children. Table 7.7 shows that almost three quarters (73%) of children aged 6 to 17 years had two or more close friends (excluding siblings). However, 12% of children aged 6–11 years, and 15% of children aged 12–17 years were reported

by caregivers to have no close friends, and hence at risk of social isolation. Fewer 12–17 year old children (32%) had four or more friends than 6–11 year old children (39%).

As might be expected, children aged 12–17 years tended to take part in more activities outside of school hours with friends than younger children. Just over one third of 12–17 year olds undertook three or more activities per week compared with about one in five 6–11 year olds.

Generally, most caregivers reported that compared with others of the same age, the child got along with their birth or foster siblings either 'better' (29%) or 'average' (56%). Few caregivers felt that the study child was 'worse' than average in getting along with birth or foster siblings than other children of the same age (11%). Good relationships with siblings were more common for children aged 6–11 years (32% got on 'better') than 12–17 year olds (21% got on 'better').

A similar trend emerged when the child's relationships with other children was examined: 19% of caregivers across both age groups reported that the study child was 'worse' in this regard compared with children of a comparable age and 27% were getting on 'better'. There were some age differences; for example, 29% of 6–11 year olds were getting along 'better' with other children of their age compared with 20% of 12–17 year olds.

Table 7.7: Caregiver reports on the study child's friendships, by child age

	6-11 years		12-17 years		Total (6-17 years)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of close friends excluding siblings						
None	40	12.2	18	14.5	58	12.9
1	41	12.5	23	18.6	64	14.2
2 or 3	118	36.1	43	34.7	161	35.7
4 or more	128	39.1	40	32.3	168	37.3
Total	327		124		451	
Number of times a week child does things with friends outside of school hours						
Less than 1	168	51.9	45	36.3	213	47.5
1 or 2	89	27.5	34	27.4	123	27.5
3 or more	67	20.7	45	36.3	112	25.0
Total	324		124		448	
Compared to others of same age, how well does the child:						
Get along with birth/foster siblings						
Worse	32	10.0	17	13.9	49	11.1
Average	174	54.2	73	59.8	247	55.8
Better	103	32.1	25	20.5	128	28.9
No siblings	12	3.7	7	5.7	19	4.3
Total	321		122		443	
Get along with other kids						
Worse	61	18.6	26	21.0	87	19.2
Average	171	52.1	73	58.9	244	54.0
Better	96	29.3	25	20.2	121	26.8
Total	328		124		452	
Behave with carers						
Worse	33	10.1	19	15.3	52	11.6
Average	166	50.9	51	40.1	217	48.2
Better	127	39.0	54	43.5	181	40.2
Total	326		124		453	
Play and work alone						
Worse	55	16.8	17	13.7	72	16.0
Average	117	35.8	53	42.7	170	37.7
Better	155	47.4	54	43.6	209	46.3
Total	327		124		451	

When caregivers were asked to compare the child to others of the same age on how they behaved towards them, nearly half (48%) felt children's behaviour towards them was 'average' and 40% was 'better'. Only 12% felt the child's behaviour was 'worse' relative to children of the same age. Caregivers were also very positive about children's capacity to play and work alone, with 46% of children in their care having 'better' behaviour than children of a similar age. Few age differences were discernible.

Table 7.8 shows proportionately more children in residential care were reported to have no close friends and fewer to have four or more friends than children in relative/kinship or foster care. It appears that children in relative/kinship care tended to have a slightly larger circle of friends than those in foster care, with fewer having no friends.

Caregivers of children in relative/kinship care tended to be more positive about the child's ability to get on with peers and with birth/foster siblings than foster carers and especially residential carers. For example, 25–31% of children in relative/kinship care and foster care were 'better' at getting on with others of the same age compared with 4% of children in residential care. However, there were only minor differences between children in the three care types on how they behaved towards caregivers.

Table 7.8: Caregiver reports on the friendships of children aged 6–17 years, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of close friends excluding siblings						
None	33	16.6	17	7.5	8	30.8
1	31	15.6	28	12.4	5	19.2
2 or 3	68	34.2	82	36.3	11	42.3
4 or more	67	33.7	99	43.8	2	7.7
Total	199		226		26	
Number of times a week child does things with friends outside of school hours						
Less than 1	98	49.5	107	47.8	8	30.8
1 or 2	61	30.8	57	25.4	5	19.2
3 or more	39	19.7	60	26.8	13	50.0
Total	198		224		26	
Compared to others of same age, how well does the child:						
Get along with birth/foster siblings						
Worse	31	15.8	12	5.4	6	23.1
Average	103	52.6	129	58.4	15	57.7
Better	54	27.6	72	32.6	2	7.7
No siblings	8	4.1	8	3.6	3	11.5
Total	196		221		26	
Get along with other kids						
Worse	49	24.4	30	13.3	8	30.8
Average	101	50.2	126	56.0	17	65.4
Better	51	25.4	69	30.7	1	3.9
Total	201		225		26	
Behave with carers						
Worse	27	13.5	22	9.8	3	11.5
Average	88	44.0	117	52.2	12	46.2
Better	85	42.5	85	37.9	11	42.3
Total	200		224		26	
Play and work alone						
Worse	42	21.0	25	11.1	5	19.2
Average	67	33.5	91	40.4	12	46.2
Better	91	45.5	109	48.4	9	34.6
Total	200		225		26	

7.4 Children's relationship with their birth family

Table 7.9 describes the birth family members with whom study children reportedly had good relationships according to caregivers and shows a higher percentage of older children (50% of 12–17 year olds) had good relationships with birth mothers than younger children (25% of 9–35 months). Although not as pronounced, a similar pattern

was evident for the child's relationship with siblings (61% for children aged 12–17 years; 44% for children aged 9–35 months). When the relationship between the child and their birth father was considered, between 20% to 30% of children were reported to have a good relationship with the father across all age groups. Very few children were reported as not having a good relationship with any member of their birth or extended family (4% to 18%), although this was more common among 9–35 month olds.

Also examined was the degree to which the child's needs in maintaining family relationships were being met (see second panel of Table 7.9). According to carers, between 74% and 82% of children's needs were met 'very well' or 'fairly well'. Children aged 12–17 years were the most likely to have their needs 'not at all well' met (11%).

Table 7.9: Caregiver reports of who the child has a good relationship with their birth family, by child age

	9–35 months		3–5 years		6–11 years		12–17 years		All children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Relationship with family member¹										
Mother	132	24.6	115	44.9	155	48.9	57	50.0	459	37.5
Father	106	19.8	74	28.9	96	30.3	22	19.3	298	24.4
Siblings (brother or sister)	236	44.0	137	53.5	184	58.0	70	61.4	627	51.3
Maternal grandparents	143	26.7	83	32.4	116	36.6	38	33.3	380	31.1
Paternal grandparents	91	17.0	50	19.5	68	21.5	8	7.0	217	17.7
Maternal great grandparents	33	6.2	22	8.6	22	6.9	6	5.3	83	6.8
Paternal great grandparents	18	3.4	8	3.1	14	4.4	2	1.8	42	3.4
Maternal aunts/uncles	139	25.9	74	28.9	96	30.3	34	29.8	343	28.0
Paternal aunts/uncles	73	13.6	43	16.8	65	20.5	20	17.5	201	16.4
Cousins	161	30.0	80	31.3	115	36.3	38	33.3	393	32.1
None of these	96	17.9	19	7.4	11	3.5	6	5.3	132	10.8
Total	536		256		317		114		1,223	
How well study child's needs met in maintaining family relationships										
Very well	261	47.1	95	37.3	123	37.7	42	33.9		41.4
Fairly well	177	31.9	113	44.3	140	42.9	50	40.3		38.1
Not very well	68	12.3	34	13.3	44	13.5	19	15.3		13.1
Not at all well	48	8.7	13	5.1	19	5.8	13	10.5		7.4
Total	554		255		326		124		1,259	

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have relationships with multiple family members.

A greater percentage of children in relative/kinship care than in foster care had good relationships with all types of birth family members and their extended family (Table 7.10). This was particularly evident for their relationships with cousins (58% compared with 9%), maternal aunts/uncles (49% compared with 10%), paternal aunts/uncles (29% compared with 5%), and maternal grandparents (48% compared with 16%). Children in foster care tended to have the lowest rates of good relationships with birth family and extended family members and were also more likely to not have a good relationship with

any of these relatives (19% compared with 8% of children in residential care and 4% of those in relative/kinship care). Many children in residential care had good relationships with mothers (60%), siblings (56%), and maternal grandparents (40%).

According to caregivers, the needs of most children in relative/kinship care (84%) were being 'very' or 'fairly' well met in maintaining family relationships compared with 76% of children in foster care and 73% of children in residential care. Overall, these results suggest that at Wave 1 of the POCLS, children in relative/kinship care had stronger connections to birth family and extended family members than children in other placement types. This is not a surprising finding given that in most instances children in relative/kinship care are placed with members of their extended family.

Table 7.10: Caregiver reports of who the child has a good relationship with their birth family, by placement type

	Foster care		Relative/ Kinship care		Residential care	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Relationship with family member¹						
Mother	183	32.2	261	44.8	15	60.0
Father	110	19.4	184	31.6	3	12.0
Siblings (brother or sister)	299	52.6	314	53.9	14	56.0
Maternal grandparents	93	16.4	277	47.5	10	40.0
Paternal grandparents	53	9.3	164	28.1	0	0.0
Maternal great grandparents	15	2.6	67	11.5	1	4.0
Paternal great grandparents	5	0.9	37	6.3	0	0.0
Maternal aunts/uncles	58	10.2	283	48.5	2	8.0
Paternal aunts/uncles	28	4.9	170	29.2	3	12.0
Cousins	52	9.2	337	57.8	5	20.0
None of these	109	19.2	21	3.6	2	8.0
Total	568		583		25	
How well study child's needs met in maintaining family relationships						
Very well	244	37.8	270	45.9	7	26.9
Fairly well	246	38.1	222	37.8	12	46.2
Not very well	94	14.6	68	11.6	3	11.5
Not at all well	61	9.5	28	4.8	4	15.4
Total	645		588		26	

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have relationships with multiple family members.

7.5 Children's contact with their birth family

Contact between children in OOHC and their birth family and other relatives is a complex policy and practice issue (e.g., Quinton, Rushton, Dance & Mayes, 1997; Quinton, Selwyn, Rushton & Dance, 1999; Ryburn, 1999). Scott, O'Neill and Minge's (2005) literature review described several positive outcomes of contact, including the increased likelihood of restoration (e.g., Delfabbro, Barber & Cooper, 2002); the

fostering of the child's sense of connectedness and identity; the rebuilding and strengthening of relationships with birth parents; and the continuance of relationships with other birth relatives such as siblings and the child's extended family. Scott and colleagues also outlined possible negative emotional effects, such as distress, grief, anxiety, resentment or anger (Rickford, 1996); and the potential for the child to experience an emotional 'tug of war' between the caregiving and birth families (Leathers, 2003).

Frequency of birth family contact

Table 7.11 shows that a large majority of children were in contact with their birth mothers (83%) and about half were in contact with birth fathers (52%) and birth siblings (49%). Grandparents were the most common extended family relative that children had contact with (57% of study children had contact with at least one grandparent). Aunts and uncles were the second most common extended family relative children had contact with (53%) followed by cousins (44%). Only 1% of children had no contact with their birth family or other relatives. Some age differences were evident. For example, fewer 12–17 year olds than younger children had contact with their birth fathers and paternal grandparents but more 12–17 year olds were in contact with their siblings.

Table 7.11: Caregiver reports of which birth family members the child has contact with (not including those they live with), by child age

	9–35 months		3–5 years		6–11 years		12–17 years		All children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother	460	81.1	231	87.2	280	85.1	97	78.2	1,068	83.1
Father	299	52.7	146	55.1	183	55.6	42	33.9	670	52.1
Siblings (brothers or sisters)	253	44.6	115	43.4	178	54.1	82	66.1	628	48.9
Grandparents	324	57.1	159	60.0	192	58.4	53	42.7	728	56.7
Maternal grandparents ¹	206	36.3	86	32.5	116	35.3	41	33.1	449	34.9
Paternal grandparents ¹	147	25.9	75	28.3	86	26.1	14	11.3	322	25.1
Maternal great grandparents ¹	54	9.5	24	9.1	24	7.3	1	0.8	103	8.0
Paternal great grandparents ¹	30	5.3	11	4.2	10	3.0	3	2.4	54	4.2
Aunts/uncles	265	46.7	140	52.8	203	61.7	69	55.6	677	52.7
Maternal aunts/uncles ¹	198	34.9	98	37.0	150	45.6	56	45.2	502	39.1
Paternal aunts/uncles ¹	115	20.3	63	23.8	88	26.8	25	20.2	291	22.7
Cousins	211	37.2	110	41.5	178	54.1	64	51.6	563	43.8
None of these	5	0.9	1	0.4	6	1.8	2	1.6	14	1.1
Total	567		265		329		124		1,285	

¹ Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive; for example, some children may see several grandparents and some children may only see one.

Table 7.12 looks at how often children were in contact with various birth family members and shows that between 2% and 14% of children had contact with various family members on 'most days'; between 12% and 27% had contact 'at least weekly'; 25% to 45% had contact 'less than weekly but at least monthly'; and 27% to 57% had 'less than monthly' contact with various family members. Looking at contact with grandparents, 15% to 18% of children had at least weekly or more frequent contact with their paternal and maternal grandparents, while just over half had less than monthly contact with grandparents.

Table 7.12 Caregiver reports on how often birth family contact occurs¹

	Less than monthly		Less than weekly		At least weekly		Most days	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother (n=1,067)	535	50.1	353	33.1	151	14.2	28	2.6
Father (n=666)	363	54.5	190	28.5	91	13.7	22	3.3
Siblings (n=628)	255	40.6	252	40.1	86	13.7	33	5.6
Maternal grandparents (n=446)	248	55.6	115	25.8	59	13.2	24	5.4
Paternal grandparents (n=317)	181	57.1	90	28.4	39	12.3	7	2.2
Maternal great grandparents (n=95)	37	38.9	29	30.5	23	24.2	6	6.3
Paternal great grandparents (n=53)	27	50.9	13	24.5	8	15.1	5	9.4
Maternal aunts/uncles (n=498)	207	41.6	125	25.1	117	23.5	49	9.8
Paternal aunts/uncles (n=289)	122	42.2	73	25.3	65	22.5	29	10.0
Cousins (n=561)	190	33.9	149	26.6	144	25.7	78	13.9
Other relatives (n=49)	13	26.5	22	44.9	13	26.5	1	2.0

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have contact with multiple family members.

Table 7.13 looks at differences across age groups on the frequency of contact and shows that a slightly higher percentage of the oldest age group (22% to 25% of 12–17 year olds) had regular contact with their birth parents (i.e., at least weekly or more often) than younger age groups (12% to 15% of 9 month to 11 year olds). There was also some variation across age groups for contact with siblings, with those under 12 years more likely to have less than monthly contact (39% to 44%) than children aged 12–17 years (34%).

Table 7.13 Caregiver reports of the child's frequency of contact with birth family, by child age¹

	Less than monthly		Less than weekly		At least weekly		Most days	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother								
9–35 months (n=460)	235	51.1	152	33.0	62	13.5	11	2.4
3–5 years (n=231)	118	51.1	77	33.3	32	13.9	4	1.7
6–11 years (n=280)	143	51.1	95	33.9	33	11.8	9	3.2
12–17 years (n=96)	39	40.6	29	30.2	24	25.0	4	4.2
Father								
9–35 months (n=297)	169	56.9	80	26.9	36	12.1	12	4.0
3–5 years (n=145)	84	57.9	40	27.6	18	12.4	3	2.1
6–11 years (n=183)	90	49.2	60	32.8	28	15.3	5	2.7
12–17 years (n=41)	20	48.8	10	24.4	9	22.0	2	4.9
Siblings								
9–35 months (n=253)	110	43.5	92	36.4	41	16.2	10	4.0
3–5 years (n=115)	45	39.1	51	44.3	13	11.3	6	5.2
6–11 years (n=178)	72	40.4	76	42.7	20	11.2	10	5.6
12–17 years (n=82)	28	34.1	33	40.2	12	14.6	9	11.0

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have contact with multiple family members.

Less than monthly contact with birth parents and siblings was more common among children in foster care than relative/kinship care (Table 7.14). Further, children in foster care were less likely to have weekly or more frequent contact with these birth family members than those in relative/kinship care.

Table 7.14 Caregiver reports of the child's frequency of contact with birth family, by placement type¹

	Less than monthly		Less than weekly		At least weekly		Most days	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Mother								
Foster care (n=540)	324	60.0	167	30.9	42	7.8	7	1.3
Relative/Kinship care (n=507)	204	40.2	179	35.3	104	20.5	20	3.9
Residential care (n=20)	7	35.0	7	35.0	5	25.0	1	5.0
Father								
Foster care (n=330)	207	62.7	96	29.1	22	6.7	5	1.5
Relative/Kinship care (n=331)	154	46.5	91	27.5	69	20.8	17	5.1
Residential care (n=5) ¹	2	-	3	-	0	-	0	-
Siblings								
Foster care (n=366)	160	43.7	151	41.3	42	11.5	13	3.6
Relative/Kinship care (n=245)	87	35.5	93	38.0	44	18.0	21	8.6
Residential care (n=17) ¹	8	-	8	-	0	-	1	-

¹ Percentages are not shown for contact with fathers or siblings for children in residential care because of the low n available (< 20).

Type of birth family contact

The type of contact children had with birth family and extended family members is shown for the total sample and children of differing ages in Table 7.15. Looking first at unsupervised contact, across all age groups, 7% of children had face-to-face unsupervised contact with their birth mother, while 6% had unsupervised contact with their birth father. Older children were more likely to have unsupervised face-to-face contact with their birth parents than younger children. Children of all ages tended to have more unsupervised contact with siblings than with birth parents, with higher rates at 12–17 years than at younger ages. Rates of unsupervised contact were much higher for extended family members (grandparents, aunts/uncles, and cousins).

Overall, across all age groups, 76% of children had supervised contact with their birth mother compared with 45% of children who had supervised contact with their birth father. Fewer children aged 12–17 years had supervised contact with mothers than younger children (69% compared with 89% to 96%) and this trend was also evident for their supervised contact with fathers and siblings. However, 12–17 year olds had higher rates than other age groups of non face-to-face contact with birth family members and other relatives (e.g., by telephone, mail, email or social networking). To illustrate, 62% of 12–17 year olds had these types of contact with their birth mothers compared with 25% of children aged 6–11 years. This likely reflects older children's

ability to use these types of communication, in particular online-based methods. Few children over all age groups had an overnight stay with their birth parents.

Table 7.15 Caregiver reports of the type of birth family contact, by child age¹

	Face-to-face unsupervised		Face-to-face supervised		Overnight		Non face-to-face contact ²	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
9–35 months								
Mother (n=460)	22	4.8	442	96.1	6	1.3	29	6.3
Father (n=299)	22	7.4	277	92.6	2	0.7	17	5.7
Siblings (n=253)	55	21.7	200	79.1	12	4.7	13	5.1
Grandparents (n=320)	131	40.9	206	64.4	19	5.9	17	5.3
Aunts/Uncles (n=264)	156	59.1	127	48.1	19	7.2	12	4.6
Cousins (n=210)	108	51.4	105	50.0	7	3.3	7	3.3
3–5 years								
Mother (n=231)	16	6.9	216	93.5	4	1.7	49	21.2
Father (n=145)	13	9.0	128	88.3	4	2.8	26	17.9
Siblings (n=115)	27	23.5	89	77.4	6	5.2	14	12.2
Grandparents (n=157)	63	40.1	99	63.1	17	10.8	23	14.7
Aunts/Uncles (n=140)	76	54.3	65	46.4	15	10.7	10	7.1
Cousins (n=110)	57	51.8	54	49.1	9	8.2	5	4.6
6–11 years								
Mother (n=280)	28	10.0	249	88.9	5	1.8	71	25.4
Father (n=183)	33	18.0	151	82.5	7	3.8	43	23.5
Siblings (n=178)	39	21.9	141	79.2	16	9.0	23	12.9
Grandparents (n=192)	97	50.5	98	51.0	34	17.7	38	19.8
Aunts/Uncles (n=203)	140	69.0	69	34.0	21	10.3	27	13.3
Cousins (n=178)	114	64.0	63	35.4	15	8.4	25	14.0
12–17 years								
Mother (n=96)	26	27.1	66	68.8	8	8.3	59	61.5
Father (n=41)	14	34.2	25	61.0	6	14.6	20	48.8
Siblings (n=82)	35	42.7	48	58.5	8	9.8	41	50.0
Grandparents (n=52)	39	75.0	16	30.8	9	17.3	22	42.3
Aunts/Uncles (n=69)	52	75.4	19	27.5	8	11.6	29	42.0
Cousins (n=64)	43	67.2	20	31.3	5	7.8	24	37.5
All children								
Mother (n=1,067)	92	8.6	973	91.2	23	2.2	208	19.5
Father (n=668)	82	12.3	581	87.0	19	2.8	106	15.9
Siblings (n=628)	156	24.8	478	76.1	42	6.7	91	14.5
Grandparents (n=720)	330	45.0	419	58.2	79	11.0	100	13.9
Aunts/Uncles (n=672)	424	63.1	280	41.7	63	9.4	78	11.6
Cousins (n=563)	322	57.2	242	43.0	36	6.4	61	10.8

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as caregivers could respond affirmatively to more than one type of contact.

² For example, telephone, mail, email or social networking.

Issues arising from birth family contact

Caregivers reflected on problems regarding the child's contact with their birth family, including interruptions to the child's sleeping routines, parent behaviour and hostility between the birth and caregiver families (Table 7.16).

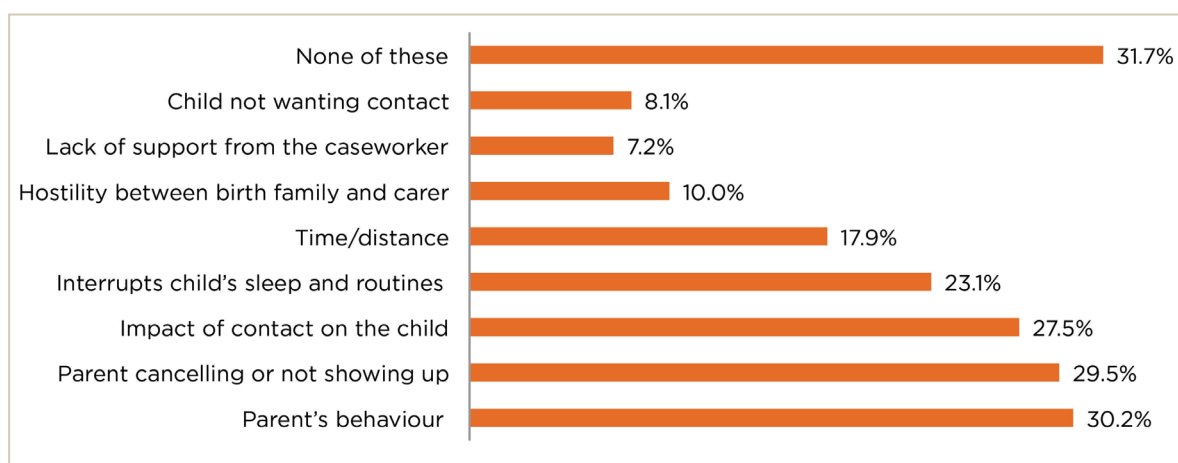
The most common reported problems were parents' behaviour (30%) and parents cancelling or not showing up (30%). Other issues that more than 20% of caregivers felt were a problem were the impact of contact on the child, and contact interrupting the child's sleeping patterns and routines. Nevertheless, 32% of caregivers reported none of these problems regarding contact.

Table 7.16 Caregiver reports of issues arising from birth family contact, by child age¹

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		All children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Parent's behaviour	149	27.8	85	33.2	104	32.8	31	27.2	369	30.2
Parent cancelling or not showing up	175	32.6	73	28.5	91	28.7	22	19.3	361	29.5
Impact of contact on the child	130	24.3	89	34.8	94	29.7	23	20.2	336	27.5
Interrupts child's sleep and routines	153	28.5	74	28.9	50	15.8	5	4.4	282	23.1
Time/Distance	97	18.1	45	17.6	54	17.0	23	20.2	219	17.9
Hostility between birth family and carer	49	9.1	29	11.3	34	10.7	10	8.8	122	10.0
Lack of support from the caseworker	47	8.8	20	7.8	19	6.0	2	1.8	88	7.2
Child not wanting contact	31	5.8	31	12.1	25	7.9	12	10.5	99	8.1
None of these	173	32.3	69	27.0	104	32.8	42	36.8	388	31.7
Total	536		256		317		114		1,223	

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of issue could arise.

Figure 7.2: Caregiver reports of type of issues arising from birth family contact



¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of issue could arise.

Differences in children's behaviour before and after contact according to caregivers are shown in Table 7.17 by placement type (due to a sample size less than 20, results for children in residential care are not discussed). Children in foster care less often showed positive behaviour before contact with birth parents (41%) than those in relative/kinship care according to caregivers (52-53%). Overall, children in both foster care and relative/kinship care appeared to display more positive behaviour before contact with their birth parents than after.

Table 7.17 Caregiver reports of the child's behaviour before and after last contact visit, by placement type¹

	Positive/ Slightly positive		Neutral		Negative/ Slightly negative	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Foster care						
Before access with mother (n=531)	217	40.9	255	48.0	59	11.1
After access with mother (n=531)	148	27.9	179	33.7	204	38.4
Before access with father (n=326)	133	40.8	154	47.2	39	12.0
After access with father (n=326)	104	31.9	103	31.6	119	36.5
Relative/Kinship care						
Before access with mother (n=491)	253	51.5	202	41.1	36	7.3
After access with mother (n=492)	177	36.0	157	31.9	158	32.1
Before access with father (n=317)	168	53.0	124	39.1	25	7.9
After access with father (n=316)	124	39.2	108	34.2	84	26.6
Residential care²						
Before access with mother (n=18)	17	-	0	-	1	-
After access with mother (n=17)	10	-	3	-	4	-
Before access with father (n=4)	3	-	0	-	1	-
After access with father (n=4)	3	-	0	-	1	-

1 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children may have contact with both parents.

2 Due to the very small of children who have data (n<20), percentages are not shown.

Table 7.18 shows caregivers' feelings about children's access to their birth families. Those caring for older children were somewhat more likely to have positive feelings compared with caregivers of younger age groups (e.g., 80% of caregivers of children aged 12–17 years had positive feelings compared with 66% of those caring for 9–35 month olds).

Table 7.18 Caregivers' reported feelings about child's access to birth family, by child age

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Feeling about child having access to birth family										
Positive or slightly positive	354	66.3	168	65.9	236	74.4	91	79.8	849	69.6
Neutral	68	12.7	30	11.8	33	10.4	12	10.5	143	11.7
Negative or slightly negative	112	21.0	57	22.4	48	15.1	11	9.6	228	18.7
Total	534		255		317		114		1,220	

7.6 Summary of key findings

Caregivers' parenting practices

- Caregivers tended to show high levels of warmth and monitoring of children's activities, and low levels of hostility.
- Caregivers reported a high level of self-efficacy in managing the child's difficult behaviours although this was lower among caregivers of older children.
- The reports from children corroborated caregivers' positive perceptions with most 7-17 year olds reporting that the adult who looked after them always helped them if they had a problem, that their caregiver always listened to them, that their caregiver always praised them for doing well and that their caregiver frequently knew about what the young person did with their free time and where the young person went when going out.

Child caregiver relationships

- Overall, caregivers appeared to have very positive perceptions of children's relationships with the caregiving family – almost all reporting having a close relationship with the child.
- Most caregivers also perceived the child's relationship with other children in the household to be close, although older age groups were somewhat less likely to have very positive relationships than younger age groups.

Child-peer relationships

- A large majority of 6-17 year olds had at least one good friend and almost three quarters had two or more close friends. Caregivers indicated that only 13% of children in their care had no close friends.
- Children aged 12-17 years tended to engage in more activities outside of school hours with friends than younger children.
- Compared with other children of the same age, around 85% of children were reported to have average or better relationships with birth/foster siblings.

- According to caregivers, approximately 90% of children's behaviour towards them was 'average' or 'better than average' when compared with that of other children of the same age.
- A large majority of caregivers also felt that the child played and worked alone better than peers of a similar age.

Contact with birth families

- Four fifths of children were in contact with their birth mothers and about half were in contact with birth fathers and siblings. Over half were in contact with grandparents and aunts/uncles. Only 1% of children had no contact with their birth family or relatives.
- In terms of frequency of contact, fewer than one in five children had frequent (i.e., weekly or more often) contact with their birth mother, father or siblings.
- Few children had face-to-face unsupervised contact with their birth mother or father, although this was more common among older than younger age groups.
- The great majority of children had face-to-face supervised contact with parents (91% with mothers and 87% with fathers) at least monthly.
- Approximately one fifth also communicated with birth parents by other means such as telephone, email, or social networking. This was more common for older than younger children.
- The most common problems arising for children from their contact with birth families were parents' behaviour, and parents cancelling or not showing up. However, 32% of caregivers reported that there had not been any problems from contact.
- Rates of positive behaviour for children were higher across all age groups before the last contact visit with their birth mother or father than after it. Older children tended to more often exhibit positive behaviour before the visit than younger children.
- The child's relationship with their birth mother and siblings tended to be better among older age groups.
- According to caregivers, four fifths of children's needs were very well or fairly well met in maintaining family relationships. More caregivers of older children had positive feelings about the child having access to their birth parents than those caring for younger age groups.
- Children in relative/kinship care were more often in touch with all types of birth family members than those in foster or residential care.
- Children in foster care tended have more infrequent contact with birth family members than children in relative/kinship care.
- Children in relative/kinship care more often had good relationships with all types of birth family members and relatives than children in foster care, and their needs in maintaining family relationships were more often viewed as being met.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter provides a generally positive picture of children's relationships with their caregivers, caregiving family members, birth family and peers in the early years of being in OOHC. The great majority of children had close relationships with their primary caregivers and other children in the household, and most primary caregivers reported knowing the child well. At Wave 1, children in relative/kinship care tended to have closer relationships than children in foster and residential care. Most children aged 6–17 years had close relationships with peers and significant others. Approximately half had a good relationship with their birth siblings but fewer had a good relationship with birth parents. There were some consistent differences across age groups (e.g., closer carer and family relationships among younger children) and across placement types (e.g., better family and social relationships among those in relative/kinship care than other placement types).