

Policy – Away from Placement or Not in Placement

(previously unplanned absence)

Introduction

The term *Away from Placement* replaces the term *Unplanned Absence* recognising feedback from practitioners that:

- a plain English term better supports clearer communication with a child, their parents and family/kin and
- terms like ‘placement disruption’, ‘placement breakdown’ and ‘unplanned absence’ are deficits-based
- the term ‘unplanned’ tends to promote crisis-driven practice culture and
- while circumstances that give rise to absence are often ‘unplanned’, it is possible for the response to become ‘planned’ after a short period of time.

This policy replaces the unplanned absence policy that currently applies to Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC).

Purpose

This policy enables funded service providers to retain case management and continue to support a child away from an authorised placement for a temporary period. During this period, the placement remains open until they return. This policy also applies to children who are ‘not in an authorised placement’ for an extended period after their placement is closed.

In doing so, the policy ensures:

- casework and support of a child, their parents and family continues
- practice consistency and relationships are maintained and
- planning around the needs of the child occurs much earlier.

Away from Placement

Definition of Away from Placement

‘Away from Placement’ is a temporary period when a child leaves an authorised placement and the *authorised placement remains open* until they return.

This includes the following scenarios:

1. entry into custody or sentencing to a period of detention
2. temporary self placement with a parent or (previous legal guardian); or someone who is not an authorised carer (someone not related to them; or another family member that is not their parent)
3. a single instance or a pattern of a child leaving the authorised placement for a period or periods of over 24 hours where their whereabouts are unknown¹
4. hospitalisation or admission to a rehabilitation program, for a period of greater than 2 weeks.

It does not include any period when a child is away from their authorised placement due to:

1. a circumstance occurring in the exercise of ordinary day-to-day care responsibility or
2. a ‘held placement’, that is an authorised placement held open by the Central Access Unit (CAU) or
3. Supported Independent Living (SIL) or Therapeutic Supported Independent Living (TSIL) placements.

The Away from Placement period ends when the child returns to the authorised placement; or the child transitions to another authorised placement; or the authorised placement is closed (without the child entering a new one).

¹ Always report a child as a missing person when their whereabouts are unknown and there are fears for their safety or concern for their welfare
https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/can_you_help_us/missing_persons

Notification of a child Away from Placement

When a child is Away from Placement, a funded service provider should complete the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) to ascertain whether a report to the FACS Child Protection Helpline is required.

MRG – Report to FACS or Immediate report to FACS

Where the MRG indicates a report to the Helpline is required, a funded service provider follows existing process to notify the Helpline.

A funded service provider also completes an *Application form for unplanned absences of Children and Young People placed with OOHC service providers*² and forwards to the district Child and Family District Unit (CFDU) within 24 hours, including the Helpline reference number³.

MRG – Report to Helpline not required

Where the MRG indicates a report to the FACS Child Protection Helpline is not required, a funded service provider completes an *Application form for unplanned absences of Children and Young People placed with OOHC service providers*² (*the application*) and forwards to the district CFDU within 24 hours.

For a child in Intensive Therapeutic Care the service provider also notifies the CAU within 24 hours when a child is Away from Placement either by email or by carbon copying the CAU when submitting the application to the CFDU.

Away from Placement period

An Away from Placement period is for up to two weeks and may be extended for a further period of up to:

- six weeks for a child in foster care (maximum combined period of eight weeks) or
- two weeks for a child in Intensive Therapeutic Care (maximum combined period of four weeks).

Eligibility Criteria

FACS approves [Away from Placement funding](#) when the funded service provider demonstrates:

- strong evidence the child will return to the authorised placement in the Away from Placement period
- strong engagement with the child and/or their parents or family/kin
- a thorough plan of exhaustive actions to support the child return to the placement.

FACS approves an extension to Away from Placement funding when the service provider demonstrates:

- they continue to meet criteria for Away from Placement funding (above); and in addition
- they have conducted a risk assessment and undertaken a formal case plan review.

Oversight and approval

Referral to the District Complex Case Panel is to be considered, according to local district operating procedures.

Approval delegation for Away from Placement funding is by Category 4 officer and above:

- Director Community Services/Director Operations and above for foster care or
- Director Intensive Support Services and above for Intensive Therapeutic Care.

Not in Placement

Definition of Not in Placement

'Not in Placement' period is an extended period when the child is not in an authorised placement, after their *authorised placement is closed*⁴. It commences:

- after expiry of the Away from Placement period (including extensions) or
- before an Away from Placement period begins, if there is immediate evidence the child cannot or will

² This form will be updated to reflect the language in the new policy.

³ A process to streamline service provider notification to CFDU/CAU is being developed with ChildStory

⁴ Note: authority to close ITC placements is with Director ISS (in consultation with FACS Districts).

not return to the existing placement or another authorised placement.

It does not include any period when a child is away from their authorised placement due to a 'held placement', that is an authorised placement held open by the CAU.

The Not in Placement period ends when the child transitions to another authorised placement; or the child transitions to other care arrangements approved by FACS and/or the Children's Court; or case management of the child is transferred back to FACS.

Decision to close an authorised placement and commence a Not in Placement period

A proposal by a funded service provider to close an authorised placement and commence a Not in Placement period:

- is discussed at the District Complex Case Panel and
- must be agreed to by FACS (before the placement is closed).

In these circumstances, the CFDU or nominated FACS unit (with secondary case management on ChildStory) ensures the child is placed on the district's Complex Case Panel agenda (if the child's safety, permanency and wellbeing is not already monitored by the panel).

Not in Placement period

A Not in Placement period is for up to 6 months, which may be extended for a further period of 6 months (maximum 12 months). It does not continue past a child attaining the age of 18 years.

Children in case management of a funded service provider receiving [Not in Placement funding](#) are reviewed monthly by the approving district's Complex Case Panel.

Eligibility Criteria

FACS approves [Not in Placement funding](#) (and any extension) when the funded service provider demonstrates:

- strong evidence that continued case management by the funded service provider is in the child's best interests
- strong engagement with the child and/or their parents or family/kin
- they have conducted a risk assessment and undertaken a formal case plan review of:
 - the child's case plan goal (with FACS involvement if change in the case plan goal is proposed) and
 - legal arrangements (with consideration of section 90 proceedings to vary or rescind the order) and
- a thorough plan of exhaustive actions has commenced to support the child transition to another authorised placement; or another approved care arrangement.

Oversight and approval

Referral to the District Complex Case Panel always occurs, according to local district operating procedures.

Approval delegation for Not in Placement funding is by:

- Category 4 officer, Director Community Services or Operations for foster care AND at a district's Complex Case Panel or
- Category 4 officer, Director Intensive Support Services and above for Intensive Therapeutic Care.

Return of case management to FACS

Case management transfer (CMT) from a funded service provider to FACS may occur under exceptional circumstances when:

- FACS and the funded service provider agree the funded service provider cannot provide the child with safety and/or can no longer achieve the child's case plan goal
- FACS declines to provide or extend a child's Not in Placement funding
- the maximum [Not in Placement period](#) is reached (without the child entering a new authorised placement) or

- at any time FACS determines that CMT to FACS is required (as commissioning agency, FACS may withdraw any child from case management of a funded service provider).

Delegation for accepting CMT to FACS is set at Category 4 (and above), Director Community Services/Director Operations or Director Intensive Support Services (for Intensive Therapeutic Care) in consultation with the FACS Contract Manager.**Funding**

Away from Placement Funding

Subject to approval by FACS, existing PSP packages continue for a child [Away from Placement](#):

Cost Component	Package Type	Cost description
Case Plan Goal	Existing package	Case planning and review; and provision of services to achieve case plan goal.
Baseline	<i>Foster Care or Aboriginal Foster Care Package or an ITC Package</i>	Staff salaries, training and recruitment, case load and case mix and overheads. Provision of placement, eg foster care recruitment, training and allowance.
Child Needs	Existing <i>Child Needs (Low, Medium or High) Package</i>	Education support, allied health, psychology and behaviour therapy.
Specialist	Existing packages.	Per Package description. Subject to eligibility criteria.

Not in Placement Funding

Modeling of the costs related to supporting a child [Not in Placement](#) has been undertaken by FACS. A new PSP baseline package – *Case Coordination (Not in Placement) Package* will fund these arrangements.

- The package **includes** the cost of:
 - staff salaries, training and recruitment; case load and case mix; and overheads⁵ (these costs are included in the existing Case Coordination (Post Permanency) Package) and
 - outreach casework, support and mentoring including the cost of youth work wages, activities, travel and brokerage.

Subject to approval by FACS, PSP packages that apply to a child Not in Placement are:

Cost Component	Package Type	Cost description
Case Plan Goal	Existing package	Case planning and review; and provision of services to achieve case plan goal.
Baseline	<i>Case Coordination (Not in Placement) Package</i>	Staff salaries, training and recruitment, case load and case mix and overheads. Provision of outreach casework, support and mentoring, eg cost of youth work wages, activities, travel and brokerage. Subject to eligibility criteria.
Child Needs	<i>Low, Medium or High Package</i>	Subject to eligibility criteria – Child Assessment Tool.
Specialist	Existing packages, subject to review.	Per Package description. Subject to eligibility criteria.

⁵ Proposed Service Model & Costs – OOHC Re-commissioning Program Board Paper 11 November 2016