

# Shaping a Better Child Protection System: Earlier preservation and restoration

## Our first priority is to keep families safely together

The amendments build on recent NSW Government initiatives including the [Permanency Support Program](#), [Their Futures Matter](#) and the [Targeted Earlier Intervention](#) reforms. These reforms aim to strengthen family functioning and support families to stay together.

## Alternative dispute resolution

To further strengthen efforts to keep families together, the amendments require the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to offer alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes to families before seeking orders from the Children's Court. Unless there are exceptional circumstances. Participation in alternative dispute resolution processes by families will remain voluntary, but will be actively encouraged.

In most cases the preferred form of ADR will be Family Group Conferencing (FGC). FGC has shown to be successful in NSW and internationally in keeping families together and preventing entries into care. FGC supports family-led decision-making. An independent facilitator helps bring families together to create a plan to keep their children safely at home or explore other permanency options that avoid unnecessary entry into care.

## Prioritised access to services for children and families

The amendments strengthen the obligation on government agencies and funded non-government organisations to give prioritised access to services to a child or young person who is at risk of significant harm and their family.

## Restoration timeframes

The Children's Court can decide whether there is a realistic possibility of restoration in a 24 month period, allowing the Court to consider whether restoration will be possible into the future. Previously the Court had to decide whether restoration was possible on the date of the hearing. The Court can now look at whether a child will be able to live safely at home in the next 24 months if the steps in the restoration plan are achieved successfully.

Children will now be able to be restored to their parents up to 12 months before a court order involving restoration expires (previously it was 6 months).