Raising them strong
Support for Aboriginal kinship and foster carers in NSW
This book is dedicated to Aboriginal foster carers and kinship carers across NSW and to our beautiful kids.

Our carers for our kids.

This book is part of the Raising Them Strong resource project that includes topic cards and a DVD. Developed with Aboriginal foster and kinship carers, carer support workers, caseworkers and the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec).

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A Keep Them Safe initiative.

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What is this book?

This book is for Aboriginal foster carers and kinship carers looking after Aboriginal kids of all ages.

You may be a foster carer or a Nan, Pop, Aunty, Uncle or cuz who wants to keep kids close to their family and community. You understand many of our kids have had a tough time.

Looking after kids of any age can be hard at times so this book has lots of good ideas to help you. It talks about how we can help kids grow up strong by listening and spending time with them, talking to them about their feelings and caring about school, their health and safety.

There are good days AND bad days when caring for a child – so don’t be ashamed to ask for help. There is a list of contacts at the back of this book.

This book includes:
- Settling in
- Growing up healthy
- Learning and school days
- Feeling safe and connected
- Family contact
- Challenging behaviour
- Loss, grief and trauma
- Sharing culture – proud & deadly!
- Support & financial help

Have realistic expectations – these kids have so much to overcome.
Tell them you are there for them and want to help them.
Settling in – some tips!

- Show the child where they will sleep, where the toilet is and where things are like toys, the telephone, TV and computer. You may need to repeat the information a few times.

- Talk about your home, family life and routines – when do you eat, when is bed time and playtime? Talk about the family – what you do each week.

- Talk about any contact with the family. Ask the child if they want to talk about how they feel and be understanding. Talk to the caseworker/agency and make sure you are clear about arrangements. Don’t talk about it on the ‘Koori grapevine’.

- Don’t criticise the child’s parents. Be understanding and help them talk about their parents without asking too many questions. Don’t make them feel shame.

- Encourage the child to display photos of their family.

- Tell the child who to talk to (and wake) if they feel sick, wet the bed, have a bad dream or feel worried. Tell them you are there for them and want to help them.

- Ask about any favourite foods, hobbies, what do they like and dislike?

- Respect privacy – don’t force a child to tell you lots of information and don’t go through personal belongings.

Does the child have any medicines/health problems?

Ask about immunisation, the ‘blue book’ health record, copy of birth certificate.

Talk about family contact arrangements and how these will happen safely.

Take the child to the doctor and dentist for a check up.
Growing up healthy

Ask the child what they do and don’t like eating. They may feel comfort with some familiar foods. Ask what they were used to and talk about your family meal times and what happens.

- Give them lots of fresh fruits & vegetables – home cooked food is cheaper!
- Try and get them to drink lots of water – avoid fizzy drinks and sugary juices.
- Avoid hot chips and take-away – make these a treat!
- Kids need rest – make sure they go to bed at a good hour for their age.
- Turn off the TV and get the kids walking, swimming and riding bikes.
- Encourage team sports like footy, netball or dancing and swimming – check out what’s in your area.

Turn off the TV, get kids walking!
Growing up healthy

Feel pride – personal hygiene

- Talk about how looking after our body keeps us clean and a good wash makes us feel good!
- Make bath time at the same time each day so the child knows it’s a regular thing to do.
- Remind them to wash their face, feet, behind the ears and teach them how to wash hair.
- Clip and clean the child’s finger and toe nails.
- Check for nits (especially if they’re scratching!) with a fine tooth comb and conditioner in dry hair – nearly all kids get them sometime! It helps to keep long hair tied back in ponytails or plaits.
- Teach the child how to blow their nose. Say ‘this helps us breathe more easily and have clear nose and ears’.
- Avoid calling the child ‘smelly’ or ‘stinky’ – explain that other kids won’t want to play with them if they are smelly or dirty.
- Wash and freshen up clothes so kids can feel pride and don’t feel different to other kids.
- Show teens how to use deodorants and tell older girls where pads/tampons are kept.

Remind them to wash their face, feet, behind the ears.
Get a routine going – keep things calm and predictable.
Growing up healthy – babies & toddlers

- Get a routine going – do things like bath, sleeping and feeding at the same time every day.
- Talk, smile and sing to baby and repeat simple sounds. Baby is learning you are the person who cares!
- Watch out when babies begin to roll and crawl! Never leave little fellas alone on a bed where they could fall.
- By about six months babies start to eat mashed food – rice and pasta, mashed vegies, banana and avocado. Baby formula and water are the best drinks (no juice/cordial) – no cows milk till baby is about 12 months old.
- Baby will need two sleeps a day – keep life calm and predictable.
- Crawling babies like to stick things in their mouth, so check out what’s on the floor. Keep poisons, sharp objects and dangerous items locked up high.
- Toddlers are curious and energetic – give them lots of cuddles so they know you care. By 18 months they will begin to feed themselves, say simple words like ‘milk’ and ‘car’ and be able to name food and body parts. At this age they like to climb – keep a close eye on them!
- Use barrier gates or lock doors to stop toddlers going into dangerous places. Keep matches and lighters out of reach.

No smoking near bubs!
Immunisation and flu shots

Keep kids well and get them immunised. It’s free and can be done at your local GP or Aboriginal medical service.

You can get a copy of their immunisation details at any time through

- Medicare online accounts
- By requesting a statement through Medicare Australia website: “Immunisation History Statement”.
- At your local Medicare Service Centre
- By calling the Immunisation Register on 1800 653 809

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged six months to less than five years are eligible for a free flu shot.

Free flu vaccines are also available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over and children aged five to 15 years who have a special medical condition that increases their chances of catching the flu.

Free flu vaccines are available through community controlled Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS), state/territory immunisation clinics and your GP.

For more information visit www.immunise.health.gov.au

Keep kids well and get them immunised.
## Immunisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Vaccine</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Birth</strong></td>
<td>• Hepatitis B (hepB)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2 months</strong></td>
<td>• Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), Haemophilus influenzae type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rotavirus</td>
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<td><strong>4 months</strong></td>
<td>• Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), Haemophilus influenzae type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rotavirus&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6 months</strong></td>
<td>• Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), Haemophilus influenzae type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rotavirus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12 months</strong></td>
<td>• Haemophilus influenzae type b and meningococcal C (Hib-MenC)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>18 months</strong></td>
<td>• Diptheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) (DTPa)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox) (MMRV)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 years</strong></td>
<td>• Diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough) and inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (DTPa-IPV)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) (to be given only if MMRV vaccine was not given at 18 months)</td>
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**School programs**

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Vaccine</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10–15 years</strong></td>
<td>• Varicella (chickenpox)&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Human papillomavirus (HPV)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (whooping cough) (dTpa)</td>
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**At-risk groups**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Vaccine</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12–18 months</strong> in high risk areas&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>• Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12–24 months</strong> in high risk areas&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>• Hepatitis A</td>
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Tantrums

Kids can get tired and frustrated and chuck a tantrum very quickly. Try to step in before tantrums begin. Be calm and try to distract kids by giving them something else to do.

Talk about feelings and how they feel.

Stopping tantrums

- make sure kids get rest and plenty of sleep.
- distract them with a book, toy or a song.
- respond when they say something, show you are listening!
- look them in the eyes – talk about feelings … “It hurts my ears when you shout”.
- use physical closeness to calm them.

Never punish or hit a child when they are having a tantrum. If you feel angry, walk away till you calm down. Don’t swear or ‘put down’ the child.

Toilet training

Most kids begin toilet training at about two or three years old. Boys usually start later than girls. You can tell they are ready if they pull at wet and dirty nappies, or tell you their nappy is wet or if they don’t want to wear nappies anymore.

Getting started

- Teach your child words such as wet, dry, wee, poo, it’s coming.
- Choose a potty, or a special toilet seat with a step so they can get up and feel safe.
- Make sure the toilet area is safe. Keep cleaners, deodorants and toiletries out of reach.
- Make sure clothing is easy to get on or off.
- Teach them to wash their hands after using the toilet or potty.

Give praise for small steps. Toilet training takes time and accidents happen. Try not to get cross!
Growing up healthy - Smoking around kids

- Smoking is really bad for babies and children – especially smoke inside the home or in small places like the car – anywhere near kids.
- It can make kids feel sick and cause middle ear infections, asthma and other chest infections. It has also been linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Quitting smoking can be tough, but it’s worth it and there are services that can help you. Call the Quitline on 13 78 48 or visit www.icanquit.com.au
Growing up healthy – little kids

Preschoolers love talking and asking questions. They need good role models to teach them.

- Kids can be fussy eaters – try yoghurt, carrot sticks, avocado, rice, meat, fish (without bones), cheesy pasta, noodles, rice and vegies, fruit kebabs, and soft cooked chicken with mashed potatoes and peas. Don’t add salt and sugar to the food.
- Make meal times fun and relaxed – eat together, praise good eating, teach them to use the fork and spoon.
- At this age kids can get lots of colds and infections. Teach them about washing hands before they eat and after going to the toilet.
- Make sure they brush their teeth and praise them for doing that. Teach them to brush after brekkie and before they go to bed at night.
- Tell them they’re deadly – kids need to know when they are doing good!

Giving time, listening to kids, hugs and smiles help to build up their confidence.

If they are not talking much, they may need their ears checked out. Hearing problems can mean trouble learning at school. Take them to the doctor for a check up.
Bed wetting

Children can feel sad or worried when they wake up in a wet bed. Tell the child that bedwetting happens sometimes, don’t be shamed and that they will grow out of it over time. Explain that sometimes the brain doesn’t send the message to the body to go to the toilet. Change the sheets, don’t make a big fuss. Make sure they have a wash in the morning to feel fresh.

- Try leaving a potty in the room at night.
- Leave a soft light on or tell them to call for you if they don’t like the dark.
- Waking them up to go to the toilet later in the night sometimes works.
- Don’t punish or tease the child – this will make it worse.
- Don’t make young children change the bed – it might feel like punishment.

Talk to the caseworker, doctor or nurse if you are worried.

Kids who act like parents

Some kids have had to be the parent to little brothers and sisters because of abuse or neglect. They find it hard to just have fun and be a kid. You may need to remind them that you care too, and have lots of experience. Be understanding, don’t dismiss their feelings. Trust takes time.
Television – turn off the box!

- Control the TV – don’t let the kids control it!
- Don’t let kids watch movies with sex, swearing and violence.
- Tell them that ads try to sell you stuff you don’t always need.
- Eat away from the TV or turn it off – make tucker time good family time.
- When they do watch TV, pick good shows that are just for kids (with a G rating).
- Don’t just let the TV be on all the time.
Growing up healthy – Water, pool, and sun safety

Water and pools are lots of fun but safety is important. Here’s a few simple things you can do to make sure kids are always safe around water.

Know where they are! Supervision

- Never leave children alone by the water. If you have to leave for a moment always take them with you.
- If you’re having a party, picnic or BBQ by the water, make sure you nominate a few adults to be specifically responsible for keeping an eye on the children at all times.
- Watch toddlers don’t go near dams, creeks, canals and rivers unless you’re with them and holding their hand.
- Make sure you or anyone who is looking after the kids by the water is not drinking and is fully alert.

TIP It only takes a very small amount of water in a bucket, esky or shallow blow-up pool for a baby or toddler to drown. Play it safe and watch at all times. Empty the water if you’re not using it!

Pool safety

- Make sure you have a barrier so that kids can’t get in to areas near the pool or Jacuzzi.
- Look out for signs of wear and tear and damage to pool fencing and gates.
- Keep pool doors shut at all times, and never prop them open.
- Clear the area so that kids don’t climb anything like a pot plant or chair to get to the pool.
- Take a first aid course so that you are prepared in case an emergency happens.
- Empty all baths, buckets, basins, and paddle pools after you finish using them.

Out in the sun

Fun by the water and fun in the sun go hand-in-hand. Keep kids protected from the sun.

- Always remember to ‘slip, slop, slap’- also, protect kids with a t-shirt, sunscreen (30+) and a hat.
- Keep out of the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 3pm).
- Set a good example and get sun smart yourself.
- Keep kids hydrated with lots of water.
Growing up healthy – school kids

Stick to a routine so the child knows how your family works and let them know what they are doing that day or for the week.

- Give kids a good start to the day with breakfast – a bowl of cereal, toast and juice and pack a lunch box with a sandwich, healthy snacks and a water bottle. Stay away from sweets and salty foods!
- Teach good habits – going to bed on time, brushing teeth, washing hands, saying thank you.
- Don’t let kids have too much ‘screen time’ – so turn off the TV and computer and make sure kids get plenty of play time and keep active.
- Keep fit together – visit the park, go on picnics and bushwalks, take a ferry or train ride, head to the beach or pool. Check out museums, go camping, try footy, roller blading and cycling!
- Remind kids that their body belongs to them and give clear information about appropriate and inappropriate touching (good and bad touching) and behaviour. A hug is good touching!

Odd eating habits? Children may hoard food or eat every meal like it’s their last. They may have experienced not knowing when their next meal was going to be. Be patient with meal times.

Mango smoothie

- 1/2 cup peeled, pitted and sliced fresh mango (or frozen mango)
- Spoonful of honey to taste
- 1/4 cup of low fat yoghurt (makes it creamy!)
- 1/2 cup ice or ice cubes
- 1/4 cup orange juice or a little lime juice

Place the fruit, honey and yoghurt in a blender. Blend on high speed for 30 seconds. Add the ice and blend until smooth. Pour into the cup… yum!
Kids at this age think they’re big but they still need you to keep an eye on them and give them limits.

Always know where they are and who they are playing with. Talk to them about being safe, what is right and wrong and what ‘truth’ and ‘lies’ are.
Growing up healthy – teenagers

- Talk about growing up and body changes – remind them that growing into an adult is a special time and we all go through it at some stage.
- Talk about relationships and ask them do they know what a good relationship is. Talk about peer pressure, when friends push you into things. How do they handle it? Remember the young person may have been abused and reluctant to talk about sex or their body so don’t push the conversation on them.
- Teach them skills for life – how to cook simple meals, making a doctor’s appointment, how to fix simple injuries, saving up for something.
- Eat together and have a yarn. Talk about the old days and when you were their age!
- Ask them to tell you where they are going and who they are with and tell them to call you if they are in trouble or stuck for a ride. Let them know they can count on you.
- Ask what they know about contraception and safe sex and have a yarn about this. If they find it hard to talk with you, a doctor or nurse could talk to them or the local Family Planning Clinic. There are also brochures and books if that’s easier.
- Talk about being a parent and what’s involved – changing nappies, sleepless nights, buying a pram!

Watch out for worries, depression or self harm. Ask for help if you are worried about the young person’s mental health and wellbeing.
Teach them skills for life – how to cook simple meals, making a doctor’s appointment, how to fix simple injuries, saving up for something.
Learning – babies & toddlers

- Babies don’t need toys that cost a lot – they will have fun with wooden spoons, cardboard boxes, pegs and banging saucepans!

- You can tell stories, read to them or play a story CD. Don’t let them watch too much television.

- Take kids to the park, the beach or bush, or for a picnic – point out birds and trees and talk about what’s around them – ask them ‘what’s that?’

- Kids like to pretend – a box of old clothes and shoes and hats can be fun! A sheet over some chairs can be a cubbyhouse.

- Get them using pencils and crayons, painting, building things with sand and blocks – they can have fun and learn about making things, colours and shapes.

- By this age kids can follow simple rules and will enjoy helping you. They are learning about playing, getting along, sharing and how to take turns.

Find out about local preschools or child care in your area. Going to preschool helps kids get ready for big school. They meet new little friends, have lots of fun and games – and it gives you a break to get things done too!
Children need to know they are loved. Even when they are naughty tell them: “I don’t like it when you do something wrong, but I always love you.”
If kids aren’t settling in at school and say they are being teased or bullied make sure you speak to the teacher or the school principal. Don’t call them a sook – listen to their feelings and talk about ways to feel strong.

**Signs of being bullied**
- not wanting to go to school
- wanting to go to school a different way to avoid kids
- lots of bruises and scratches
- saying they have no friends
- talking about hating school
- being unhappy, crying

Make sure you talk to the teacher or Aboriginal Education Officer. Don’t take matters into your own hands.

**Bullying is wrong**
Kids online – keeping them safe

These days kids always want to be online – whether it’s on their phones, ipads or the computer. It’s important to make rules around how much time a child spends online and know what they’re up to keep them safe.

- Always keep the computer (or ipad) in a common area of the home, like the living room, and not in the child’s bedroom, so you can keep an eye on what’s going on.
- Talk to kids about what they do online and the importance of having time away from the screen – tell them it’s not good for their eyes to spend too long close to the screen.
- Try to encourage kids not to bring their phones or ipads to the dinner table. Set a good example and don’t bring your own phone to the table.
- Encourage family activities like games, riding bikes, swimming and walks that don’t involve screens and technology.
- Switch off the tv and internet connection if you need to so you can get the kids outdoors!
- Don’t let pre teens have access to Instagram and Facebook until they are the right age.
Kids online – keeping them safe

Make sure kids don’t stay up late being online – they need lots of sleep. Make sure they charge their phones and ipads outside the bedroom so you can be sure they’re resting.

Cyber-bullying

Kids and teenagers need a helping hand when it comes to being online and keeping safe. Help stop kids in your care from being bullied online. This is when others (often other kids at school) use the internet (instagram, twitter, snapchat and Facebook), mobile phone, or a camera, to hurt or embarrass the child. Some example of this can be:

- people sharing embarrassing photos of the child on the internet
- people posting bad stuff about the child online
- people setting up fake profiles pretending to be the child
- people spreading rumours about the child online.

It’s pretty common for a child who has been a victim of cyber-bullying, to feel stressed, sad, unsafe, and even guilty.

- Talk to kids openly about cyber-bullying and cyber-safety- let them know they can come to you for help.
- Monitor what they get up to online and always set a time limit for how much they can spend on the internet.
- Make sure they know never to share their passwords with anyone, and that all their online profiles are kept private.
- Tell your kids not to respond to any online or text messages sent by cyber-bullies. But always keep a record.
- Never blame the child or shrug off the problem with a “kids will be kids” attitude.
- If there are threats of physical or sexual violence, always call the police and let your caseworker know.

Check out the fantastic resources at www.esafety.gov.au
Learning – school days

Visit the school together and talk about where things are like the drink taps, toilets, school office and classroom and what the school offers (like sport and music). Meet your child’s teacher together and ask about an ‘education plan’ and what you can do to help with learning.

- Try on the uniform and shoes before the first day – make sure everything fits! Having the same uniform helps kids feel like they belong.
- Get kids to practice with the lunchbox to make sure they can open the lids.
- Explain the basic school rules, such as putting up your hand, asking before going to the toilet, listening quietly, taking turns and doing what the teacher asks.
- Be on time for pick up. If you’re late it could make your child feel alone and worried.
- Children can be tired and grumpy for the first few weeks so aim for early bedtimes!
- Get involved – meet the teachers, go to concerts and sports days, help out at the canteen. Be part of NAIDOC Week activities or go along to excursions. Be part of school life!
- Make time for homework and ‘readers’ – turn off the TV, clear the table. Encourage your child to do their best.
- Ask about the Education Plan for your child or talk to the Aboriginal Education Officer if your school has one.
- Don’t forget to look in their bag for school notes and homework!

School holidays

Always plan ahead – do you need help or support with the kids during the school holidays? Do you want to go away? If you are planning to take the child on a holiday to another state or overseas you will need to talk to the caseworker or agency and let them know in case of an emergency. Call up early and talk about holiday plans – don’t leave it to the last minute!
Learning problems and getting help

Some kids really struggle with learning and this makes going to school hard for them. They may find it hard to pay attention, remember things, talk to you or struggle with reading or numbers. Some kids also have problems with behaviour and co-ordination.

The sooner kids can get the right help – the better!

**Learning difficulty** – kids with learning difficulties have ‘delays’ – they might be late in talking or using a spoon or struggle to write letters. Learning difficulties happen for lots of reasons like intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities, emotional problems, from not going to school or stress from what they’ve been through.

**Developmental disability** – kids with developmental disabilities have a significant impairment in cognitive, language, motor or social skills which is likely to continue as they grow up.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder** – kids with ADHD can’t pay attention for long and find it hard to settle. They’re easily distracted, lose their temper quickly and find it hard to follow rules. Not all kids with these behaviours have ADHD, so it’s best to talk to your doctor.

People who can help:

- Teacher, school counsellor or Aboriginal Education Officer
- Caseworker, support worker or your agency
- Child psychologist or family counsellor
- Doctor, speech therapist or physiotherapist
- School – ask about reading and maths recovery programs
- Aboriginal Health Service or Child Health Clinic
- Other foster and kinship carers in your community
- Tutor – who can help your child learn one to one
Learning – high school

Starting high school is a big change so be ready for some ups and downs. Help them feel strong and confident and be positive about learning.

- Get to know the school – meet your child’s teacher, the year coordinator, the Aboriginal Education Officer or welfare coordinator or special needs teacher. That way if problems arise, you know where to go for help.
- Keep an eye on how they’re going so you can spot any problems early on.
- Talk to your teen about school and notice how they talk about school – for example, are they clamming up or sounding bored? There might be a problem. Ask them how is the school? Do you see your friends? What are you learning in Science this term?
- Go along to the parent-teacher interviews, read school reports and keep track of what they are learning. Ask the caseworker or teacher if you think learning is a problem – they might suggest a tutor or a special program.
- Make a quiet spot for homework and study away from the TV, computer and mobile phones. When the internet is needed keep an eye on the websites. Talk to the teacher if you’re not sure about it.
- Let your child know that school mates are welcome. Tell them to invite friends over or be ready to take them to their houses. Get to know other parents.

Let them know you’re proud of them for trying hard at school, whatever the marks! Teach them about trying your best at things in life and being proud.
Don’t speak down to kids, give them some responsibility for their age – this builds trust.
Feeling safe and connected

The impact of abuse can last forever but you can help a child be a survivor. Making kids feel safe and secure is important. They can feel really hurt and not trust anyone – this stops them from accepting love and support.

Ways to make them feel safe and secure

- **Stick to routines – be consistent**
  A familiar routine can provide comfort, especially during times of change. If your schedule is going to change, talk about it with the child in your care.

- **Set limits and boundaries**
  Consistent, loving boundaries make the world seem less scary for children with attachment problems. Let the child know that house rules help keep everyone safe.

- **Offer choices**
  Giving the child some control or responsibility (that’s right for their age) may help them feel more safe and comfortable.

- **Take charge but remain calm when your child is upset or misbehaving**
  Remember the child doesn’t know how to handle their feelings and needs your help. You need to stay calm and show them how to handle emotions.

- **Nurture**
  Hugs, cuddles, rocking – it’s important for kids to feel closeness and warmth. Be aware that for some kids touch is associated with pain/abuse. Look at their reaction and change your actions if needed so they feel okay.

- **Try to understand behaviours**
  For example, when a child takes and hoards food, don’t see it as “stealing” but as a possible response to not having enough food in the past.

- **When they act younger**
  Some children who are socially and emotionally delayed may act younger than their age when upset or sad. If they are tearful and frustrated (like a two year old) then it’s best to comfort them like a younger child.

**Be honest if things aren’t going well.**
Talk to someone – other carers, caseworker, doctor.
Sexual Abuse—what to do if a child tells you they have been abused

All kids have the right to live in safety and be free from abuse of any kind. So, if you ever have any concerns about the safety of a child speak to your caseworker.

When children come into care and feel safe, they may feel more comfortable about revealing or talking about their experiences of abuse or neglect. This may be a confronting and emotional time for you and the child.

What should you do if a child tells you about their abuse?

The most important and immediate things you can do when a child tells you about abuse or neglect are:

- always believe him/her
- reassure the child that telling was the right thing to do
- stay calm
- never promise a child that you won’t share their abuse with anyone
- let the child take their time
- let the child use their own words
- never quiz or interview the child about what they are saying—this can interfere with any investigation, which should only be done by professional child protection workers or the NSW Police
- let the child know exactly what you will do next
- don’t confront the person believed to be the abuser

It’s sometimes difficult for kids who have been abused to trust adults and feel safe around others.

There are lots of things you can do to help a child feel safe and cared for in your care.

- Some kids don’t like to be hugged and cuddled as much as others—so don’t force hugs and kisses on children who seem uncomfortable with being touched.
- Be careful with playful touch, such as tickling. They can be uncomfortable or scary reminders of abuse to some kids.
- Help kids learn that privacy is important—remind them to knock before coming into bathrooms and bedrooms. Always lead by example.
- Encourage kids to dress and bathe themselves if they can (but never leave babies/toddlers in water alone).
- Don’t watch movies with any adult content like kissing, sex scenes, or violence anywhere near children.
Make sure older siblings with boyfriends or girlfriends are aware of their actions around kids and that they’re always setting a good example.

Never punish, or make a child feel guilty if they touch themselves in public - it’s normal for kids to be curious about their body parts.

You can help them to become comfortable with privacy, by saying something like: ‘your body parts are private, and it’s okay for you to touch them in private’.

If the child is acting in sexual ways that you’re not sure how to deal with, then always ask for help from your caseworker.

If you have any worries that a child is at risk of being abused or neglected, then you should contact the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

If you want to learn more or have any questions about any of the above, contact your caseworker who will be able to help you.

There are lots of things you can do to help a child feel safe and cared for in your care.
Contact can help them build family relationships in a safe place and with support.
Family contact

Children in care need contact with their families to keep them connected to who they are and to give them a feeling of identity. Kids need to be able to love their family and be with their kinship or foster family without feeling guilty.

Family contact can help kids feel stable and secure – for example, they may see their mother is safe and this helps them feel better about living apart. Contact can help them build family relationships in a safe place and with support.

Family contact needs to be safe Talk to the caseworker or agency about family contact. When will it happen? How often? How will the child get there? Contact might be ‘supervised’ where the child is not alone with the parent or family member or it can be ‘unsupervised’. Contact may include phone calls, sending photos and letters, email or texting.

Supporting family contact

- Ask the family about the child’s care and speak positively about the child.
- Keep the parents informed about events in the child’s life (e.g school sports days).
- Take photos of special events like the first day of school, and pass on to the family.
- Share drawings, copies of school reports and sports information.
- Keep the Life Story Book or a ‘life diary’ for the child (see page 36).

Talk about travel arrangements at meetings and let the caseworker know early if you can’t take the child for any reason. Try to plan ahead!

Some carers like to put the phone on loudspeaker when the family/birth parent calls to speak to the child if there is a worry about what they might say – like being angry or making false promises they can’t keep.
**Family contact – how to support kids**

Contact can stir up a lot of mixed feelings for kids – anger, sadness, happiness and confusion. It’s good for them to talk about how they feel.

**Supporting kids**

- Speak to the family and about the family in a positive way.
- Don’t forget special times like Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Christmas and birthday (help the child to phone or send a card).
- Get the child ready for contact – think of things to do, what to talk about, what to expect.
- Be there for the child after the visit – ask questions and listen to the child. Tell them you understand and you are ready to listen – when they feel like talking.

**Dealing with problems**

Remember foster and kinship care can make parents feel shame and blame. They may resent you for looking after their child, even when they understand why and want the best for their child.

If you are having trouble talk to the caseworker or contact carer support. In an emergency call the police. This might include upsetting phone calls, or a parent wanting to take the child when they see you both in the street. If they are aggressive and want to take the child, try to walk away. If they are violent or make threats, it may be safer to let the child go and call the police immediately.

Some carers carry the ‘placement letter’ in their bag for emergency situations.

If you see the family in the street, shops or in a public place say hello and be respectful. Some carers have good relationships with birth parents and family.
Aboriginal carers talk about family contact

‘I don’t really like the parents but I never put them down. I try to be positive and say to my child you have two sets of parents who all care about you.’

‘I had one Mum who got upset because her little girl called me Mummy. But the little girl ran over to her birth Mum when we went to see her. She knows you care I said to her. I tried to reassure Mum – it’s hard for everyone in these situations isn’t it?’

‘I didn’t do a great job raising my own kids – I want to get it right this time with my grandkids. There is support for me – but it’s not easy dealing with family troubles.’

‘I took my child to Kempsey from Sydney to visit her birth Mum. I think they both really appreciated that.’

‘It’s a team effort – you as the carer family, the worker and the parents – we’re all important to the kids.’
Challenging behaviour

When our kids are not so deadly!

Kids giving you a hard time, playing up or being cheeky? Some days aren’t easy. Part of this is growing up and learning right and wrong but it can also come from what kids have seen and been through.

Ways to prevent challenging behaviour

- Make life settled – let the child know the house rules and stick to routines.
- Provide love, encouragement, respect and acceptance.
- Listen to the child and notice if something is worrying them.
- Give them lots of praise – show them you notice good stuff.
- Help them to have hope – talk about what they might do when they get older.
- Let them know you are there for them – talk about feeling sad or angry.
- Take an interest in what they do – ask them questions, join in.
- Encourage bored kids to play sport, ride a bike – burn off their energy with positive play.
- Tell kids it’s good to have some quiet time – read, draw or listen or play music.

Set clear rules and talk to each other

- ‘I want you to be home by 6pm so we can eat together as a family.’
- ‘We don’t hit – let’s talk about why you are angry. Let’s solve it together.’
- ‘Let me know who you’re playing with, where you’re going – then I know you’re safe.’

Talk things over.

Explain rules keep us safe and teach us respect.
Challenging behaviour

Stay calm! If you feel angry walk away and take a deep breath. It doesn’t help to smack a child and can make things worse. Avoid arguing – when we get angry we can say things we don’t mean.

Ways to deal with challenging behaviour:

- Don’t ignore the behaviour – it may get worse!
- Be clear about what you want – talk about good and bad behaviour.
- Let your child know what happens because of bad actions – how it makes people feel upset and sad. Talk about saying sorry; how to make things right.
- Let the child know you still love them but don’t like what they are doing.
- Let them know nothing is so bad that they cannot talk about it.
- Listen without judging.
- Use ‘time out’ for younger children or a ‘star’ chart for good behaviour – or think of your own way, like stickers on the fridge – 10 stickers means a treat!
- Don’t let kids watch violent TV, movies or video games.
- Make sure kids get plenty of sleep – tired kids can be hard to handle!

Violent behaviour – get help!

If your child is violent, hurts you or other people or plays up, don’t be frightened to ask for help. Talk to the caseworker/agency or carer support or talk to a teacher or doctor. Some kids have learning or emotional problems or health problems (like they can’t hear properly) and this makes them feel angry or frustrated.
Loss, trauma and sorry business

Children need to know that loss is a part of life and they need carers to teach them how to cope with grief, loss and trauma in a gentle way.

Kids feel loss and grief when someone has died or when they can’t live with their own parents, brothers and sisters. They may have to leave the family home and go into foster care or live with the relos – Aunt, Uncle, Cuz. They may feel loss after being abused or leaving behind friends or pets.

How kids cope with loss

- Acting younger than their age and acting up
- Having troubles at school or with school work
- Trying to defend their family, brothers or sisters – they may want to look after someone weaker
- Showing anger in play, towards toys or other people around them.

A child who has had a lot of loss might feel sad, angry, frightened and not trust anyone. This can make it hard for them to grow. It’s a big hurdle and can make you feel bad too.

If you are worried about how your child is coping and think they may need help then talk to the caseworker or a school counsellor. Find out about child psychologists or family therapists who understand deep problems and can help.
Loss, trauma and sorry business

Let them know they can trust you and explain in simple words the truth about the loss. You can also tell the child you’re sad too. Let them know feeling sad is normal and healing takes time.

How to help

- Ask them how they are feeling. Let them cry, talk and be angry in a safe way.
- It’s okay to show your feelings. Showing how you cope will help them.
- Encourage the child to do a drawing, write a letter or poem about how they feel.
- Let them know it’s not their fault – tell them “I’m here for you”.
- Listen and watch out for signs that the child is not coping.
- Make sure the child gets good rest.
- Comfort them if they are unsettled or have a bad dream.
- Stick to family routines and the same home, keep things settled.
- Offer them the choice about whether they want to attend a funeral.
- Don’t leave the child alone for a long time.

Funerals and sorry business

Funerals are a way of saying goodbye and respecting the person who has died. Before the funeral, talk to the child about what happens. Some funerals mean lots of mob coming from everywhere. Talk about who might be there and if there’s a gathering after the funeral. Is there anything cultural they need to know? Some Aboriginal Elders don’t like to talk about the person who has died but encourage the child to talk about loss when they want to.

They might be scared of going, so give them a choice. You could help them have their own farewell – light a candle, say some special words or a prayer, or visit the grave when the child is ready.
Sharing culture – proud & deadly!

There are many ways to help Aboriginal children feel connected to Aboriginal culture and identity. Some children have both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal origins but still have a right to build and nurture their Aboriginal identity.

- Attend local Aboriginal cultural and community events.
- Be part of NAIDOC Week festivals and events.
- Find out about the child’s ‘mob’ and encourage the child to be proud of their Aboriginality.
- Ask the caseworker or agency about Culture Camps.
- Visit areas of significance to the Aboriginal child in your care.
- Be part of the Aboriginal community – go to exhibitions, cultural events, footy knockout.
- Tell or read Aboriginal stories or play some deadly sounds!
- Talk about bush tucker and the old ways of doing things.
- Go on bushwalks – talk about bush, land and sea.
- Talk about cultural customs, laws, language and tradition or find out together.
- Watch child friendly movies about Aboriginal culture.
- Encourage children to use traditional Aboriginal designs in their work.
- Try some art & craft projects – make an Aboriginal flag or paint bark.

Let them read the Koori Mail www.koorimail.com.au or visit Deadly Vibe at www.deadlyvibe.com.au
Caring for YOU!

Carers need to take some time out for themselves when caring for children. Don’t feel shame to ask for help – this shows the kids that it’s okay to ask for support.

Plan ahead and think about what help and support you need – is it emotional support and someone to talk to or practical help during the school holidays?

- Think about support and who you can count on e.g. sisters and brothers, Aunty, other Aboriginal carers, the caseworker.
- Plan ahead for school holidays and weekends. Try to plan short breaks with family and friends. Talk to the caseworker about holidays if you want to take the child interstate or overseas.
- Ask about kids holiday camps and school holiday programs in your area.
- Stay calm when things might not be going too good.
- If you’re not coping, take deep breaths – walk away if you feel angry – what makes you calm?
- Count to 20 before making a decision if you’re feeling angry or stressed.
- Listen to some music, read a magazine or book to get your mind off things.
- Find time for YOU – join a sports group, go for a walk, see a movie, try bowling or swimming, have a cuppa with a friend.
- Keep a sense of humour – have a LAUGH.

Join a carer support group or ask if there are carers who live near you – meet for a cuppa.

Go to carer training – you’ll meet other carers going through the same things.

Talk to your caseworker when things are tough and you need a break.
Financial assistance

Foster and kinship carers are able to access support from Centrelink and the Family Assistance Office. Below are the main benefits depending on your income and eligibility. Contact Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office to find out more.

Family Tax Benefit (FTB): helps carers with the cost of raising children and is income-tested. This payment is made up of two parts – part A and part B. You can get payments fortnightly or annually.

Parenting Payment: You may qualify if you’re single and the primary carer of at least one child under eight, or you’re partnered with at least one child under six OR you and/or your partner’s income and assets are below a certain amount.

Work participation requirements exemption: Authorised carers who receive the Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance are eligible to apply for an exemption from Centrelink’s work participation requirements. Each year Community Services mails out certificates to authorised carers or you may need to contact your agency.

Other payments you and your child may be eligible for:
- Child Care Benefit
- Child Care Rebate
- Education Tax Refund
- ABSTUDY
- Carer Allowance (child)
- Assistance for isolated children

Health Care Card (HCC): All children/young people in care are eligible and concessions include cheaper prescription medicines, bulk-billed doctor appointments and reduced out-of-hospital medical expenses.

Immunisation allowance: Paid in two separate amounts – the first if the child is immunised between 18-24 months of age – lodge your claim before the child’s second birthday. The second is paid if the child is fully immunised between four and five years.

Kids with disabilities: extra help!
You can get extra money, help and services if you care for a child with a disability. This may include money to get your home adjusted (like adding hand rails or wheelchair access); help with transport or a worker to take your child to school or medical appointments; home care help – especially if you are an older carer; and respite care to give you a break.

Talk to your caseworker or agency about what help is available.
What is **Guardianship**?

When children can’t go back into the care of their parents it is always in the child’s best interest to strengthen their identity by keeping them connected with their family, culture, and community.

Guardianship is different to fostering or adoption, but lets relatives like aunts, uncles, or grandparents (and sometimes approved non-family members) give a permanent home to a child.

If you have been authorised as a child’s guardian, then you have full responsibility for making all the daily and long-term decisions regarding the child.

Family and Community Services won’t continue to be involved with your family if you become the guardian of a child- unless there is an order from the Children’s Court asking that FACS continue involvement to monitor certain things- for example, supervision between the child and their parent(s).

Guardians have responsibility for organising contact with the child’s family - when the child will meet their family, where, how often and so forth.

Make sure to talk to the child about how often, where and when they want to see their family members and let them guide the way (within reason).

If you are the guardian of an Aboriginal child, it is really important you make sure the child keeps their connection to culture, family and community.

**For more information**

Speak to your caseworker or to your local Family and Community Services office.

**Guardianship is different to fostering or adoption.**
Help and support

My useful numbers

Talk to your caseworker, worker or agency  Keep in touch with people who can help – either the caseworker, support worker or call AbSec or Connecting Carers. Talk about education, health, payments and family contact and ask if you have any concerns or changes relating to the child and their care. AbSec provides support for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.

A caseplan is a plan for the child between the caseworker/agency and the approved carer. This plan includes important decisions about the child’s health, education, family contact and any payment information. It should include if the child has special needs. Talk about the caseplan with the caseworker.
Help and support

Aboriginal Statewide Foster Carer Support Service
1800 888 698 or 9559 5299

Connecting Carers NSW
(advice, support and training)
1300 794 653

CREATE Foundation
1800 655 105

Parent Line 24 hours
1300 130 052

Karitane Care Line
1300 227 464

Tresillian Helpline (24 hours)
1300 272 736

Child Protection Helpline
132 111 (24 hours)

Useful websites

- [www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au) – support and advice for Aboriginal carers
- [www.connectingcarersnsw.org.au](http://www.connectingcarersnsw.org.au) – support and free training for foster and kin carers
- [www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au) – find child care and preschools in your area
- [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au) – lots of good info about raising kids
- [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au) – support, workshops and fun for kids in care
- [www.learninglinks.org.au](http://www.learninglinks.org.au) – help for kids with learning disabilities
- [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au) – for information and resources on foster care and child protection

Education

Aboriginal kids should have their own learning plan. Speak to the school or contact the Department of Education [www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au) or call the Aboriginal Education Unit – 02 9582 5800

NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
(02) 9550 5666
[www.aecg.nsw.edu.au](http://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au)

Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305 to find child care or visit [www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au)

Indigenous Professional Support Unit NSW (child care/preschools)
1800 450 472

Health

Take your child for a check up and talk to your doctor or Aboriginal Medical Service.

NSW Department of Health

Find an Aboriginal Medical Service 02 9212 4777.

Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Aboriginal Disability Network NSW