

Carer support and training

An easy guide for caseworkers

Putting a spotlight on carer support and training is critical to nurturing stable placements

Every foster, relative, and kinship carer requires assistance, education and access to support systems to aid them in their responsibility of nurturing children and young people in out-of-home care.

Each caregiver possesses unique attributes, and the specific forms of assistance, training, and support they require will vary depending on their individual strengths and competencies in child rearing. It will also depend on the child's needs and age, their own age and health and support network, as well as their personal capacity for resilience and the challenges they face.

What do we need to do?

- Get in earlier with support and training and be resourceful in how you help carers navigate caring issues
- Get back to carers, follow through and ensure carers feel valued and heard
- Don't leave all the 'admin and emotional' burden with carers alone
- More targeted information and training about challenging behaviours, disability, cultural care and understanding trauma
- Put in place informal and formal respites early that work for the carer and child
- Strengthen early assistance for carers in understanding the restoration journey and ensure preparation (such as preparing for change, grief and loss supports) with the carer is taking place and consider if can form part of a 'caring network' to support the child's family if suitable.

"Training on the code of conduct would be useful as it can be difficult to understand as a new carer." – Sally, foster carer from Sydney Metro.

Questions to ask the carer

"Until we look after the carers we have, we will continue to lose carers & won't encourage new families to join the journey"
– Jenny, foster carer & adoptive parent, Illawarra Shoalhaven

- What are you finding easiest and what is the most challenging part of your caring role?
- What forms of support or training would help you? (For example, formal and informal respite, training, peer support and connection, referrals to local services like after school care, or help with household tasks like cleaning)?
- Who do you have in your personal support network e.g., family and friends, school community, other foster carers?
- How do you look after your own needs? How do you make time for self care?

Tips

- Communicate with caregivers in a respectful manner, actively listen, and avoid appearing as if you're "ticking a box".
- Value and pay close attention to their experiences.
- Account for any additional challenges they may face, such as age, health issues or financial stress when determining the support they require.
- Acknowledge their accomplishments – caregiving can be draining and demanding!
- Contemplate ways to assist them in navigating bureaucratic processes and streamlining procedures.
- Engage in conversations about self-care and explore avenues for them to access rest and rejuvenation.
- Consider the potential impact of change – such as grief, loss, or anxiety. This may arise due to changes in placement or the anticipation of restoration plans. Ensure you prepare the caregiver and address their emotional needs during such times.

"I like it when I feel included in discussions about decisions relating to the child in my care" – foster carer 41-50yrs, NGO, Nepean Blue Mountains.

Types of support

"It takes so long to get support when needed." – Gary, grandparent carer, Murrumbidgee

- Ensure carers know the Agency or District's afterhours options.
- MFF Carer Support Line - 1300 782 975, Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, Interpreter Service: 131 450, <https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/carers-support/>.
- Carer connection events coming up through My Forever Family - <https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/news/>, AbSec, local carer groups.
- AbSec Carer Support Line - 1800 888 698, Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, <https://absec.org.au/help-for-carers/>.
- Parentline NSW – 1300 1300 52, Monday to Friday 9am – 9pm and 4pm to 9pm on weekends - <https://www.parentline.org.au/>
- Click [here](#) for more crisis numbers and helplines

Training options for carers

Enhancing the skills and knowledge of carers is essential for the well-being of both the carers and the children in their care. It helps caregivers develop the skills and knowledge necessary to provide safe and nurturing environments and ensures that they meet legal requirements and stay up to date with best practices in caregiving.

Training is particularly important, where specific skills and understanding of child development, trauma-informed care, and other relevant topics are crucial. Further, training boosts carer's confidence in their abilities. When they are well-prepared and knowledgeable, they feel more capable of handling challenging situations.

Ensure you keep carers up to date on what training your agency can provide.

There are many training options for carers to take advantage of through My Forever Family and all of the training offerings are FREE for authorised foster or kinship carer, guardian or adoptive parent from out-of-home care.

My Forever Family’s training sessions are available online or in-person, so whatever their preference there is something for them. If the carer has difficulty attending training because of their busy schedule, My Forever Family offer a range of recorded webinars they can access in their own time, from the comfort of their own home.

Explore the options together with the carer discuss together the most relevant and ensure they know how to enrol <https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/training/>. Be curious and follow up after the training to discuss what they learnt and how they might use what they learnt in their caregiver role.

AbSec provide cultural connections workshops as well as trauma Informed training specifically intended for Aboriginal carers or carers providing care for Aboriginal children <https://absec.org.au/>.

Resources for carers

- [Caring for Kids Guide](#)
- [Financial guidelines for foster, relative and kinship carers](#)
- [Leading the way a guide for carers.](#)
- [Carers code of conduct](#)
- [Leaving and Aftercare Resources](#)
- [Independent Living Skills Checklist](#)
- [Your Next Step for young people](#)
- [Reconnection Guiding Principles](#)
- [Care Leavers’ Charter of Rights](#)



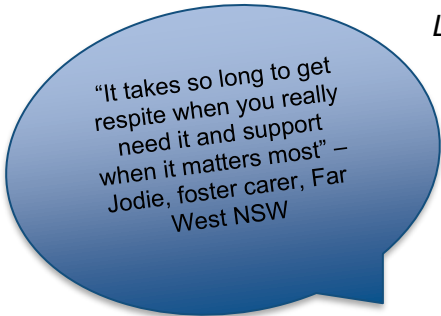
“Agencies need to communicate, collaborate, listen and then take action, then carers will be more inclined to go to them and actually speak.”—Andy & Sarah, foster carers, Sydney West

Great resources for raising children (universal)

- [Raising Children Network](#)
- [Cybersafety](#)
- <https://kidsafe.com.au/home-safety>

Referrals and connections

Support can also be about local referrals and connections that help reduce isolation, teach carers new skills and empower them with strategies to navigate challenging behaviours or offer respite and support. These might include:



“It takes so long to get respite when you really need it and support when it matters most” – Jodie, foster carer, Far West NSW

Local playgroups, grandparent playgroups

Homework centres, tutoring programs at the local library

PCYC, Headspace, barista courses, safer drivers course

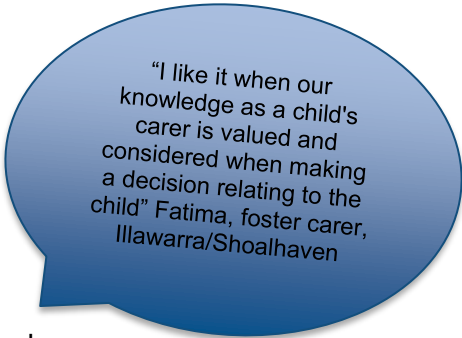
Cultural camps, sporting clubs, bushwalking groups

Carer peer support groups, LINKS, parenting courses,

Tips from carers

Carers tell us:

- they would like improved communication and greater interaction... 'please just reply to us so we know'.
- they sometimes struggle to apply lessons learned in training to their own context. They would like their caseworker to show an interest in their training and focus on application of what was learnt to support strengthening their capability.
- they would like support earlier when required and not when things escalate to crisis. Get in early with support, training and referrals and recognise when carers are feeling distress and dissatisfaction and provide support as required.
- providing care can be emotionally challenging and this emotional toll on carers may be discouraging for new carers. Carers require recognition and to be able to access support when required - without judgement or fear they will lose the child in their care. This support needs to be flexible and tailored to the placement – it might be establishing respite, some short term help with a cleaner, connection to peer support, help with navigating online booking systems for a child's appointment, or respite so they can have a break from caring a recharge.
- they are frustrated by too much red tape and lack of guidance from caseworkers – they also would like caseworkers to 'follow through' on topics discussed or help requested.
- they want greater interaction with their caseworker and to be acknowledged as part of the team of people working towards the safety and best interests of the child in their care.



"I like it when our knowledge as a child's carer is valued and considered when making a decision relating to the child" Fatima, foster carer, Illawarra/Shoalhaven

This is a short guide to support caseworkers to provide carer support and training and referrals for foster, relative and kinship carers. This guide has been developed in response to feedback from carers through the NSW Carer Survey and feedback from Carer Reference Groups.