



Communication Considerations.

Thoughtfully communicating about Out-of-Home Care

As a leader talking to your church about Out-of-home Care, you may bring your own lived experience of the system and those navigating it, or you may be brand new to the space.

If it's quite new to you, it's so important that we take a moment to consider our communication about things that have the potential to hit hard and cut deep, or provide a learning moment, for members of your audience; always seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance.

We've created these Communication Considerations to support you in sharing about The Homeward Project with your church.



SENSITIVITY:

It is always important to be sensitive around content, language, and tone, being mindful of children and young people with a care experience, birth parents and carers who might be in the audience. This can be a space of pain and potentially triggering for some. Be careful to avoid generalising experiences of those who have diverse and unique experiences within a complex Out-of-Home Care system. If talking about Out-of-Home Care at the same time as themes of serving the “vulnerable” or “marginalised”, consider how someone with a care experience might respond to the messaging and tone.

FOSTER CARE IS NOT FOR EVERYONE:

Don't advocate for it too strongly or without sufficient caution. It is important to try to find a balance between scaring people off and not preparing them enough. Foster Care should be approached prayerfully, with wise counsel and within community.

REUNIFICATION:

Restoration of family is the goal of any Foster Care arrangement. This is linked to legislation and government department mandates, which are often not well understood and can be a cause of frustration. The positive aims of the system, while not perfect, need to be respected and the ultimate goal of family reunification supported, believing that God is capable of reconciling even the most broken relationships.

GRACE:

Reflect a grace-filled view of all stakeholders involved in Out-of-Home Care, including birth families, agency staff and the department. No one is perfect. We are all in need of redemption, grace and reconciliation.

FAITH & HOPE:

Bring a faith-based and hope-filled perspective while remaining genuinely empathetic and not ignoring the very real challenges that carers face.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Do not publicly identify children as being in Out-of-Home Care and don't share a child or young person's story, or a carer's story without their permission. Use of stories, images or video should only be with informed consent. Ask the carer if you have any questions about what is or isn't allowed to be shared.



PEOPLE NOT LABELS:

Children in Out-of-Home Care are children first. Being in care is one part of their experience, it does not define who they are. No one is the “foster kid”.

INCLUSION:

Use inclusive language, for example, saying to children: ‘go and find your grown up’ or ‘who did you come here with this morning?’, or to the church: ‘the adults who are collecting children should go now’, rather than just using ‘parents’. It may seem like a small thing, but it can make a huge difference.

STRENGTHS-BASED:

Maintain a strengths-based approach; people are not projects or problems to be solved. Affirm every individual’s inherent dignity, capacity and potential to overcome challenges, rather than focusing on the problems.

HUMILITY:

Listen, don’t offer solutions. Be open to learning more about the experiences of those involved with Out-of-Home Care. Ensure humility regarding any personal preferences regarding parenting or ways of responding to various behaviours. The requirements and processes of agencies need to be respected, even if not always agreed with.

“ORPHAN”:

It’s important to not make simplistic jumps between use of the term ‘orphan’ in biblical times and vulnerable children today. In the Bible ‘orphan’ and ‘fatherless’ generally referred to a child who, because of societal structures, was economically, legally, and socially vulnerable. ‘Orphan’ often implies that a child who has lost both parents and can conjure images that are isolated and outdated. Most children in the care system have been removed from parental care, so ‘orphan’ isn’t an accurate or useful word to use. The Bible is of course deeply relevant, however, context matters and Scripture should be sensitively related to current-day people and examples.

EVANGELISM:

The Homeward Project is not an evangelistic program and careful communication is needed around this. There are significant challenges and restrictions around the level of exposure to faith-based activities for children in out-of-home care. The goal and the heart of this program is to bring restoration and healing to children in need of care by supporting their carers to provide this, as an outworking of the restorative nature of the gospel. It is important that this is clearly communicated to the church and prospective carers.



The Homeward Project

is a movement of Australian Christians committed to better outcomes for children and families with an experience of the Out-of-Home Care system.

The Homeward Project provides a bridge between the child protection system and the local Church, offering resources and opportunities to grow in depth and reach and make a difference where it's really needed in our communities.

For more information and resources visit homewardproject.org

