



Program Guidelines. Considering Out-of-Home Care.

When designing and offering kids and youth programs, churches can support Foster Carers to meet their obligations and provide inclusive environments through the following:

<i>Prior to programs:</i>	Giving adequate advance notice and details of the program so that out-of-home carers can comply with any obligations to obtain consent or approval from the Case Manager as required (for example interstate travel, religious worship different to their family of origin, regular child-minding, or regular social activities).
<i>During programs:</i>	Being mindful of the program's content and discussions, not speaking about a child being in care, always being respectful of child's family and faith of origin, avoiding high risk activities, keeping record of any incidents, and being sensitive regarding religious instruction.
<i>After programs:</i>	Ensuring that no carer obligations are breached, particularly through the use of information and media.

Be willing to adapt and change.

Recognise that many children in out-of-home care will have experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect and they are usually having to cope in new and scary situations. Foster and Kinship Carers are doing all they can to love, nurture and support the children in their care. Be flexible and ready to adjust your programs, routines, and expectations to accommodate them, rather than expecting them to do so for you.

Please note, the details of these guidelines are accurate at the time of writing but both State and Territory Department and Agency policies and standards may change over time.



CONSENT:

- Be mindful of the limits on a carer's decision-making power.
- In many States, a child's participation in interstate travel, religious worship or to receive religious instruction (that is different from their family of origin), requires express consent of the Case Manager.
- In Victoria, a child's participation in regular social activities requires the consent of a Case Manager. In other States, regular child-minding may also require consent.
- Where a program is known to trigger a consent requirement or an obligation to inform, the details of the program should be made available with adequate advanced notice in writing to the Carer and the Carer should be encouraged to pass those details on to their Case Manager. This should include details outlining the nature of the program and Child Safety Policy information.
- A Carer is restricted from waiving legal liability, so dangerous or high-risk activities should be avoided.
- Consent forms should allow for a Carer or Guardian to sign, not just "Parent(s)".

TRAVEL:

- In many States, a child's participation in interstate travel requires express consent of their Case Manager and any interference with schooling or family contact visits is a consideration.
- The details of any program requiring travel (e.g. Summer Camps or Conferences) should be made readily available to Carers and Carers should be encouraged to pass these details on to their Case Manager so Foster families can verify that permission has been granted if required.
- The requirements surrounding travel of children in care vary across States and Territories. Compliance may be assisted by ensuring that programs:
 - Do not require attendees to travel interstate;
 - Do not require air travel;
 - Do not run for more than three consecutive days; and
 - Are held only during school holidays.
 - No co-sleeping is permitted.
- Be mindful that if the event involves a high level of religious instruction, which might conflict with the beliefs of the child's birth parents, consent may not be forthcoming.

¹ High risk activities include activities such as trampolining, surfing, diving, horse riding ice-skating, skiing, white-water rafting, rock climbing, abseiling, high ropes courses, go-karting, motorbike riding, parachuting, hang gliding.



MEDIA & PHOTOGRAPHY:

- Confidentiality must be maintained, which includes no photographs or other identifying depictions on social media or traditional media, particularly of the child's location.
- Ensure that no Carer obligations are breached through the use of media, including photos and video.
- Stories, photos or video of children in programs are not to be uploaded to social media or otherwise disseminated in any way without the express consent of the Carer and the child.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY:

- It is both insensitive and unlawful to openly speak about a child being in care (e.g. announcing, "This is Sam and he is a foster child"). Do not openly discuss a child being in Foster Care or any court matters.
- It is not appropriate to ask a Carer why a child is in their care.
- Information about (or media depictions of) a child can only be published with the required approvals and with the child's own express consent.
- Don't include details of care families in any public forum without their permission, including prayer lists, Facebook groups, etc.
- Any compromising information about a child that is disclosed incidentally should be kept strictly confidential.
- Being sensitive to the needs of children in care is essential, but confidentiality should never be promised.
- Carers should be encouraged to share information with Kids or Youth teams about how to help meet a child's needs but this does not mean sharing any confidential information about the child. For example, "Mary gets very anxious if people raise their voices..." does not provide any unnecessary information about Mary's past or current experiences.
- Potential privacy breaches should be handled in line with your church's Privacy Policy, thoroughly documented, and all concerned parties informed as soon as possible.
- If programs are advertised as available specifically to out-of-home care families, every effort should be made to ensure that participating families are not publicly identified as participants.
- Where looking to communicate where a particular child could be at risk and must only be collected by the carer that dropped them off, a neutral system could be adopted e.g. a heart on their name label/sticker or another coded way of quickly conveying the information with the team.



BIRTH PARENTS & REUNIFICATION:

- The primary goal of Foster Care is family reunification and this should be supported.
- A Foster Carer should never be encouraged to skip a contact visit in order to attend a church program.
- Do not initiate communication about a child's family of origin. If a child initiates discussion about birth parent visits, listen empathetically but do not 'fuel the fire' if negative in tone, or suggest that the child skip visits. Any concerns should be noted with the Carer who can discuss with the Case Manager.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP & INSTRUCTION:

- It is important to be sensitive about evangelising to a child in Out-of-Home Care.
- Permission may be required for a child in Out-of-Home Care to receive religious instruction and to engage in religious worship and should be discussed with the Case Manager.
- Be sensitive to the cultural/religious background of the child. Never openly criticise other faith practices or cultures as this could put both the child and Foster Carer in a predicament.
- A Carer or child's objection to the religious content of any program should be respected.
- A child cannot be baptised without the consent of their Case Manager or birth parents.

MEDICAL ATTENTION & INCIDENTS:

- Ensure that you are notified of any pre-existing health conditions that require ongoing monitoring or the intermittent administering of medication.
- Any injuries or other health concerns arising during the course of a program should be dealt with in the usual manner with the child's health as the foremost priority.
- Prescription painkillers should not be used unless consent is obtained.
- All incidents of a medical nature, or injury, property damage, or harmful behaviour, should be reported according to your church Child Safety Policy and Procedures and information provided to 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

