



# STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND FOSTER FAMILIES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA



This Statement of Commitment represents an understanding between the Department for Child Protection and Departmental Foster Families providing care services to children and young people in Western Australia.

For the purpose of this document “**Foster Families**” refers to all people who have been registered by the Department to provide care to children and young people who are in the CEO’s care. This will include general foster carers, relative and significant other carers.

The Statement of Commitment is complemented by the Foster Families’ Charter of Rights and the Principles and Minimum Service Standards for foster care. The Foster Care Handbook for Foster Families outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Department for Child Protection and Foster Families caring for children and young people.

The Statement of Commitment represents a commitment to ensure that children and young people who are in the CEO’s care in Western Australia receive quality care in safe and nurturing environments.

## WHAT IS IN THE STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT?

The Statement of Commitment outlines a set of *Beliefs* that form the basis of the *Fostering Relationship* between the Department for Child Protection and Foster Families. The *Aims of the Fostering Relationship* then describes ways to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people who are placed in foster care.

The Statement of Commitment is distributed to all families providing care for children and young people placed by the Department for Child Protection.

## BELIEFS

The following is a set of beliefs supported by research and evidence-based practice. These beliefs guide our approach towards the best possible practice in foster care and help to articulate what foster care aims to achieve for children and young people who are in the CEO's care.

- The best interests of children and young people are paramount
- Children and young people who come under the care of the Department are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society
- Where possible, children and young people should be maintained in their family of origin
- Intervention to protect or support children and young people should aim to maintain involvement by the child's family as much as possible

- A child or young person should have the opportunity to participate in the assessment and care planning processes that result in decisions being made on their behalf
- The child or young person's family, foster family and community should have the opportunity to participate in the assessment and care planning processes that result in decisions being made on behalf of the child or young person
- Individuals, families and communities can be assisted to build the capacity to care safely for their children
- Placement should be a planned process that acknowledges the significance of the impact of attachment, grief and loss for a child or young person who is separated from family, community and social network
- The importance of cultural and religious aspects of a child or young person's background should be considered (Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Child Placement Principle apply)
- The likelihood of the return of a child or young person to parents/persons with parental responsibility reduces with time, emphasising the importance of intensive intervention at an early stage
- Return of the child or young person to parents/persons with parental responsibility is the primary goal at the time of placement where this is assessed as consistent with the child or young person's best interests
- When a child or young person is not able to live with parents/persons with parental responsibility, preference is given to placement options with extended family, community members or significant others who can provide for their safety and wellbeing

- The maintenance of connections with significant family and community members is crucial to the development of the identity and wellbeing of a child or young person regardless of whether they are in short-term or long-term care
- Where relationships are healthy and well established, children of the same family (such as siblings, cousins, etc) should be placed together. This should occur as soon as possible
- Connections between children of the same family should be maintained
- Secure, stable and enduring living arrangements should be made for children and young people:
  - Where return to parents/persons with parental responsibility is not appropriate or has been attempted unsuccessfully; or
  - Where connections to parents/persons with parental responsibility have not been maintained; or
  - Where significant attachments to alternative carers have developed over time.
- Children and young people should have the opportunity to maximise their potential while in care. This includes focus on safety, care arrangements, health, education, social and family relationships, recreation and leisure, emotional and behavioural development and identity and culture.
- Care Planning for children and young people in care should occur regularly and/or in response to significant events such as leaving care or a significant change in the plan for the child or young person.

## THE FOSTERING RELATIONSHIP

The Department for Child Protection is the State Government agency that has the legal authority to intervene in families and communities when children have been harmed or are at risk of significant harm. When a child comes into the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) care the Department may have partial or full parental responsibility. Depending on the circumstances representatives of the Department may act to make decisions on behalf of the child or young person.

"Foster Care" describes family-based care of children and young people who live apart from their families. Foster families are those families who have been registered by the Department for Child Protection or an approved government-funded agency to care for children and young people. Foster families volunteer their services. Whilst they are financially compensated for the cost of caring for children or young people they are not employees of the Department.

The Department's activities are guided by four major principles:

### **Engagement, Collaboration, Inclusiveness and Capacity Building**

**Engagement** describes the way the Department relates to families and communities.

**Inclusiveness** insists that the most disadvantaged children, families and communities in society have equal access to services.

**Collaboration** describes the way the Department involves children, families, other agencies, services and Foster Families.

**Capacity Building** describes a way to help families or communities to better respond to their needs.

The Fostering Relationship is an inclusive and collaborative relationship between staff of the Department who make decisions, and foster families who provide day to day care to children and young people. Whilst the Department has the final authority, decisions on behalf of a child will be mindful of the views of the foster family.

The capacity of the Department and Foster Families to work in this collaborative and inclusive way relies on a shared understanding of the aims of the fostering relationship in meeting the needs of children and young people while they are in care.

## AIMS OF THE FOSTERING RELATIONSHIP

The *Aims of the Fostering Relationship* describes ways to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people who are placed in foster care. These aims are:

- To provide a safe and nurturing environment to children and young people free from harm or neglect. To ensure this, children:
  - Should be respected
  - Should be free from abusive or humiliating experiences
  - Should not be subject to corporal/physical punishment
  - Should not be subject to inappropriate or harmful material on the internet
  - Should be provided the opportunity to realise their potential and build their self-esteem while in foster care.

- To help children and young people to deal with attachment, grief and loss issues that arise from a move into care, a move from one placement to another and a move to leave care. The impact of these changes can be reduced where-
  - Children and young people are able to participate in decisions made on their behalf.
  - Changes are managed as sensitively as possible acknowledging the vulnerability of the child or young person whose self-esteem has already been damaged.
  - People and places important to a child or young person before the changes, are maintained as much as possible. For example, when a child comes into care, connections to family, friends and community may be helpful. When a child moves in care, connections to the former placement may be as important as when a young person leaves care.
  - Services are available to support children and young people who are expressing the distress of separation.
- At the time of placement to work quickly toward the return of children to their family where this is considered appropriate. This requires-
  - A planned process of intervention
  - Working alongside the child or young person's family to develop their ability to care for their children safely
- To respond to the cultural and religious aspects of a child or young person's background while they are in placement. This would be guided by the Department's:
  - Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and
  - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Child Placement Principle

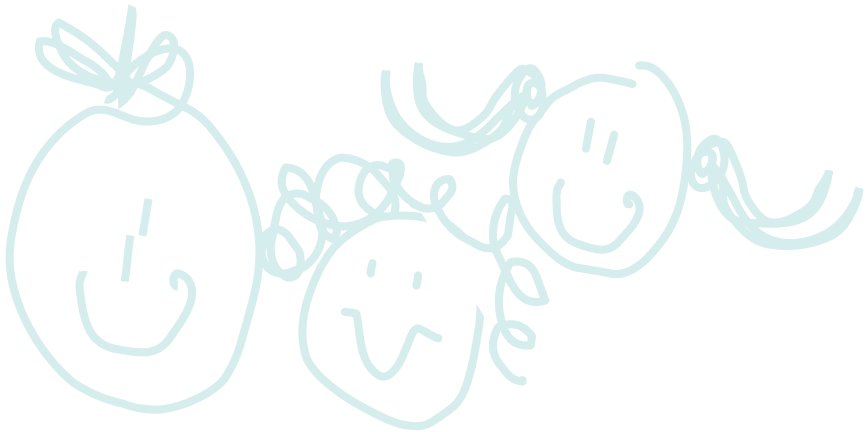
- To explore placement options with family, community members or significant others in the first instance when a child or young person is unable to remain with their parents/ persons with parental responsibility. This may require-
  - Assessment and approval of relatives or significant others
- To look for placement options with family, community members or significant others if the child or young person is unable to return to their parents/ persons with parental responsibility in the short-term. This may result in-
  - Temporary placement with an approved carer until the child or young person can be placed with a member of the child's social network
- To keep or make connections with significant family and community members as a way of maintaining the identity and wellbeing of a child or young person in care. This may result in-
  - Contact
  - Shared care (where a family still has the child for a significant amount of time)
- To place children of the same family together when these relationships are healthy and well established. This may require-
  - Temporary placement of children apart with significant ongoing contact, until placement together is possible
- To keep or make connections between children of the same family who are placed separately. This may include-
  - Contact between placements
  - Contact with children remaining with parents/ persons with parental responsibility

- To help children and young people to maximise their potential while in care.

This would include the consideration of aspects of development including-

- Safety
  - Care Arrangements
  - Health
  - Education
  - Social and Family Relationships
  - Recreation and Leisure
  - Emotional and Behavioural Development
  - Identity and Culture
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- To plan for children and young people in care on a regular basis and/or in response to significant events such as leaving care. These plans would include-
    - The child's views
    - A parent of the child's views
    - The foster carer's views
    - The views of any other person considered by the CEO to have a direct and significant interest in the wellbeing of the child
    - Departmental views
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- To plan for stable and enduring living arrangements for children and young people who cannot return to their parents. This may result in-
    - Long-term placement with relatives or significant others
    - Long-term placement with a foster family
    - Parental responsibility by relatives or significant others; via a Protection Order (Enduring Parental Responsibility)
    - Parental responsibility by foster family; via a Protection Order (Enduring Parental Responsibility)
    - Adoption by foster family (in exceptional cases)

- To ensure that children and young people who have stable and enduring living arrangements continue to maintain connections with family members. This may result in-
  - Contact between placements
  - Contact with children or young people remaining with parents/persons with parental responsibility



Distribution of the Statement of Commitment will be the responsibility of Fostering Services (General Foster Carers) and the responsibility of District Offices (Relative and Significant other carers)

The Statement of Commitment takes effect from September 2004 and was updated September 2007