

Case Planning in Out-Of-Home Care - Practice Tips

This document provides practice guidance when developing a case plan for any child or young person (child) who is in out-of-home care (OOHC). It is the second of two documents for OOHC case planning. For an overview of case planning see [Case Planning in Out-of-Home Care](#). See also [Foundations of Case Planning](#) for further information.

A child in OOHC will have one of the following case plan goals:

- restoration
- guardianship
- open adoption
- long-term care.

Out-of-Home Care Case Planning

Case planning is the process we use to make sure children and young people in out-of-home care receive the care and support they need to experience safety, stability, permanency, connection and wellbeing.

Your agency should have an OOHC case plan template for you to use. These are individualised within each agency.

The case planning cycle is made up of planning, implementation, monitoring and review.

Planning for the OOHC Case Plan

Including children in planning

Children have a right to participate in decisions that adults are making about their lives. This means children need to be involved in case planning. By having a strong relationship with children, you can help them meaningfully participate in decisions.

You must have regular contact with children when you have primary case responsibility (case management). This helps you to get to know the child including:

- their experiences of trauma and how they understand this
- the developmental stage that they are at
- their personality
- their strengths
- any worries they may have
- their interests, needs and wants.

Children need to be able to understand what people are saying at a case plan meeting. Use language that children can understand. This will be different for all children and will depend on their age and development.

Take time to get to know the child, how they communicate and to listen to what they want. Children will communicate in many ways. Pay attention to what they are saying, showing you or doing.

Try to use open ended questions when talking with children so you can best understand what they are saying. Open-ended questions allow us to better understand what children need and want. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- We are going to have a case planning meeting for you soon, what do you think a case plan meeting is?
- What do you think might happen at the case planning meeting?
- What are the things that help you to feel safe?
- Who are the people that you feel safe around?
- What things are important to you?

Open ended questions usually begin with:

- What if...?
- How do you feel about...?
- Why do you think...?
- How did that...?
- What might...?
- Tell me more about...

Including parents, family and significant people

Parents, extended family, carers and significant people need to be included in the case planning process. It is important to include these people, regardless of the case plan goal. Even when a child is in long-term care, their family and network must be included.

Your relationship is key in all areas of case planning. Parents, family and significant others are a part of the care team. You need to maintain open and transparent communication with all.

Things you can do to involve families include:

- Use language they understand
- Listen and hear their thoughts and wishes and validate their feelings
- Be open and honest about the case plan goal and explain how important it is for them to be a part of decision making for the child
- Set clear boundaries for the meeting so there are no surprises
- Consider the venue and where people will feel comfortable to meet.

If parents, families and significant others do not want to work with you, you need to explore why this may be and work to rectify the situation.

Planning for the meeting is important and it is good practice to check with all parties about where they feel comfortable and what day and time suits people.

The case plan meeting

Arrive early to the meeting so you are ready and set up when people arrive. You will need to have all the resources required to conduct the meeting, including:

- tables and chairs set up in a way where it promotes participation, sometimes tables can be a barrier
- access to a whiteboard or butcher's paper (and markers) in case you need to use this
- all documents and information required for the meeting including the views of those who may not attend
- a template to record the minutes of the meeting
- a meeting agenda.

Be clear before the meeting starts who will chair the meeting and who will take the minutes. The chair of the meeting should be a manager.

At the beginning of the meeting, be sure to set the scene and develop a group agreement. All parties should be aware of the purpose of the meeting and case plan goal during the planning phase. Having a clear agenda will support the meeting to remain focused. You will need to ensure that all parties are given the opportunity to have their voice heard. If the meeting gets side-tracked, bring the focus back to the child. Your communication, including language and tone, must be respectful even if the meeting becomes challenging.

When talking about tasks, be sure that the party that is responsible for completing it understands what they need to do, when it needs to be completed by and who will check it has been done.

See [Case Planning in Out-of-Home Care](#) for further information.

Developing the OOHC Case Plan

Documenting or writing up the case plan in language that everyone can understand is important. People need to understand the case plan, what tasks have been allocated to them, and what they need to do. The case plan should be written soon after the case plan meeting and distributed to all parties. Ask for feedback on the document and, if necessary, make changes. This supports everyone to move forward and have a clear plan.

Consider developing a case plan for the child. This will be derived from the original case plan. Use a format that the child can understand based on their age, development and capacity. Use child-friendly language or pictures to help the child understand their case plan.

If you are conducting a case plan review you need to document the progress of any tasks including if they have been achieved as well as the impact they have had for the child.

Always use non-blaming and child and family friendly language in case plans. Some examples are below:

Language to use in casework	Language not to use in casework
Home, live with	Placement
Family visit/s, family connection	Contact
Temporarily living with	Crisis care
Left home due to...	Abscond
Living with due to...	Permanent Care

Implementing and Monitoring the Case Plan

As a caseworker, it is your responsibility to help implement the child's case plan and follow up on tasks. This is part of your everyday casework. Maintain regular communication with everyone to check in on whether the case plan tasks are being completed.

Your agency might have processes and policies where you undertake regular progress reviews towards the objectives and tasks of the case plan. This is an opportunity for you to document why decisions were made including when a task is no longer required.

Make sure your conversations and updates are well documented. A caseworker who is not familiar with the child should be able to read their case plan and understand:

- which tasks have been completed and the outcome
- any progress that has been made towards achieving a task
- whether there have been challenges in achieving a task and the work done to overcome these.

If there are challenges in implementing the case plan tasks you need to identify why. Keeping good relationships with everyone involved will help you know when someone might need extra support in carrying out their tasks. Always remember that a case plan is a living document.

Talk to the child, carers and people involved in the child's life as much as needed.

Reviewing an OOHC Case Plan

When reviewing an OOHC case plan, the casework you have undertaken in implementing and monitoring is key to a successful review. Staying in regular

contact with all the people involved in a child's life will make a review of the case plan easier and more productive.

When arranging an OOHC case plan review follow the tips and information for planning and arranging a case plan meeting. There shouldn't be any surprises if you have been providing ongoing casework.

The way you work with children, families, carers and services is the key to successful outcomes for children. The way you communicate is fundamental for relationship building and supporting successful OOHC case planning. The case plan is the road map putting everything together for a child.