

Foster Care Assessment

Foster care is provided to children and young people who are unable to live with their own families, this may be for a short period of time or on a longer-term basis. Foster carers provide a safe, nurturing and secure family environment and take on the day-to-day responsibilities of a parent.

Children in care have a lot of love to give and helping them to grow and thrive is a wonderful experience. Caring can also be demanding, often because of a child's history of trauma. Children in out-of-home-care (OOHC) need people who are prepared for, and who are able to cope with these challenges.

Assessments allow you to collect information and make decisions about:

- where a person is suitable to be a foster carer
- whether they have a safe environment and community
- what type of care they may be best suited to provide.

The relationship between your organisation and a carer starts with their application. Use the process to get to know and understand a potential carer so that you and other people in your organisation can best support them on their caring journey. Be open, honest, reliable and supportive from the start.

Please see: [Relative and Kinship Care Assessment](#) for further information.

Assessment

Foster care assessments can be undertaken by caseworkers from both Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and Permanency Support Program's (PSP) or independent assessors.

Whether you are completing the assessment yourself or outsourcing to an assessor, it is your agency's decision as to whether the applicant/s have the skills and capabilities to become a foster carer. Carrying out the assessment in a timely manner will keep applicants engaged and motivated to become carers. Assessments should also be culturally sensitive.

The assessment process can also help to determine which type of care the applicant/s will be best suited to. This can include respite, emergency, short-term care, or long-term care. It may also indicate whether they have the potential to be a guardian or adoptive parent. The assessment process will also help you decide the type and number of children they can care for.

PSP Service Providers Responsibility During the Assessment

Each PSP Service Provider has their own process for foster care assessment, ask your manager for further information. Many PSP Service Providers use the [Step by Step Training and Assessment Tools](#). The [Office of the Children's Guardian](#) also provides information about what should be included in an assessment.

Your role as a PSP caseworker is to:

- explain the process to potential applicants, including why we need different types of information
- assist the applicant to complete a foster carer application
- support applicants through the process and help them understand what caring will be like
- obtain relevant documentation for medical, probity and referees checks
- carry out a home safety inspection
- ensure all probity checks are undertaken (explained below)
- conduct face-to-face interview/s
- provide pre-authorisation training or arrange for applicants to attend this training
- analyse and reflect on information gathered throughout the process
- gather information about a carer's family history and undertake carer life story work
- support your agency to make an informed decision about whether a potential applicant should be authorised, and if there should be any conditions
- Inform the applicant of the outcome. If you are not recommending authorisation you should discuss the reasons why they were unsuccessful.

Probity and Suitability Checks:

- Agencies must conduct probity and suitability checks for applicants and certain household members
 - identity check
 - check the applicant's identity
 - Working with Children check (WWCC) (18 years and over)
 - [NSW Police - Criminal History Check](#) (for applicants and all household members 16 and over, and may be conducted on a household member 14 years and over, if the PSP Service Provider believes necessary)
- A DCJ check, for a form and further information [Community Services Check for Carer or Household Member \(16 years or over\) Applicants](#). This form should be emailed to CSCheck@fac.s.nsw.gov.au
- A 'designated agency check', from other organisations the person/s may have cared for.

Face-to-Face Interview

Interviews with foster care applicants (and their residential family members) cover a broad range of topics that help to ascertain whether they will be suitable carers (see below). Prepare the applicant by explaining the process, what topics will likely to be discussed and that the information asked may be sensitive. Make sure that the interview time suits the applicant and that they can be interviewed freely without interruption. Inform the applicant about the types of documentation needed for probity checks (sometimes getting this can take time). Explain that the applicant's family, who live with them may also be interviewed.

The interview questions may span the following topics:

- motivation behind wanting to foster
- views, experiences and attitudes about parenting
- understanding of children's needs and development including how they will support children who have experienced trauma,
- values

- understanding and attitudes towards supporting relationships between children in care and their family
- family dynamics and relationships within the household
- relationship with partner and other family members
- impact of fostering on other children that live in the house
- support network
- interests and skills
- health and lifestyle
- home environment
- work commitments
- infertility (if applicable – applicant only)
- cultural background and awareness, religion, worldwide views and attitudes towards supporting a child’s culture
- their history including upbringing, family and any grief, loss or trauma in their lives
- understanding and resolving conflict
- ability to work with others.

Use open-ended, curious questions to help you explore a potential carer’s readiness. Reflect content and feelings and use your summarising skills to help ensure you have understood what they are saying. Use empathy skills when talking about painful and sensitive events. Notice body language, tone and style, not just what they have said. How did they interact with you and others? What did you observe about the way they reacted? What did you notice about their home?

Answer questions they have about what fostering will be like with openness and honesty. Be real about the difficulties but remember to also talk about the joys.

The interview is a good time to start exploring who in their network can support them with caring. Who could provide the breaks that all people caring for children need? These people could become formal ‘respite’ carers or could help care for children more informally.

Applicants should be informed about the following:

- [Code of Conduct for Authorised foster, relative and kinship carers.](#)

- [NSW Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care.](#)
- support and assistance for foster families
- permanency options for children in care
- the significance of family heritage and cultural identity for children in care
- the importance of supporting the relationship between children and their birth families
- understanding of the impact of abuse, neglect, grief and loss and associated trauma on childhood behaviour and development
- supporting children with challenging behaviours and stress
- Life Story Work.

All Prospective Foster Carers Must:

- complete a foster care application form
- complete a health check including mental health and physical health
- provide two personal referees who are not related to them
- provide a signed statement they have read, understood and will comply with the [Code of Conduct for authorised foster, relative and kinship carer](#)
- have a home safety inspection
- participate openly and honestly in interviews
- complete pre-authorisation training for carers (many organisations use the Shared Lives training).

Assessment

Your organisation is likely to have a template or report to help guide your assessment. Your assessment should be an ongoing process that starts with your first conversation and is finalised as part of the analysis that forms your final report.

Your assessment should not just be about your judgement, you are also helping people to assess whether fostering is right for them. Training is a key aspect of the self-assessment process. You should also use training as part of the information that informs your assessment. If you are not delivering the training yourself, make sure you receive reports from the trainers about the applicant's participation and the

trainer's professional judgement about any strengths or weaknesses that participation in the training has raised.

Remember that no one is likely to be a perfect carer (just like there are not perfect parents). Your assessment is to ascertain whether they will be able to provide adequate care, meet the needs of children and to make sure they won't pose a risk to a child. Talk with your colleagues if there are issues that are worrying you. Raise them openly and respectfully with the potential applicant. Part of your assessment is to uncover what areas carers might need support with such as when experiences, behaviours or other aspects of children's lives might trigger something for them. Be careful to check your cultural and other biases.

See: [Critical Reflection](#) to help with this.

Your final report should analyse all the information you have gathered throughout the process in a succinct, balanced and honest way. Make sure all your analysis is centered on how it will affect children. This includes how they will work with you, other casework staff, birth families and other people in the child's life. Your analysis might also include information about the sort of children that would suit this potential carer. (to help with placement matching).

Further Information

Information on becoming a foster carer, types of foster care, how to apply, what to expect, legal matters, and rights and responsibilities can be found on DCJ websites.

[About Foster Care](#)

[Becoming a Carer](#)

For further information including recruitment information and support for potential carers, visit [My Forever Family](#).

Please see: [Relative and Kinship Care Assessment](#) and [Foundations of Assessment](#) for further information.

[Caring for kids](#) is a guide for foster, relative and kinship carers – it is also a helpful resource for casework staff as it has many answers to frequently asked questions.

For information on carers probity and suitability checks for provisional and full authorisation can be found in the Office of the Children’s Guardian’s [Carers Register Fact Sheet 1 – Probity and suitability checks for carers and household members](#).