Foundations of Family Preservation

Despite the many joys of parenthood, it does require vast amounts of patience, emotional regulation and often leads to sleep sacrifice. Research and lived experience tell us that parents require support networks and financial resources to be their best.

Most people will adjust to pregnancy and parenthood with a little time, but some parents will struggle to keep their child safe. These parents will need additional support, skills, and resources to keep their child at home, safe and thriving.

A priority of the Permanency Support Program (PSP) and the NSW child protection system more broadly is to keep children safely with their families, wherever possible.

What is Family Preservation?

Family Preservation is based on the premise that children have a right to be cared for by their parents and that most parents will be able to provide safe and loving care for their child with short term, intensive and practical help.

Family Preservation is about working with parents and families as early as possible. When a parent is supported to develop parenting skills through a difficult period, their child can stay at home safely, immersed in culture, love, and belonging. In cases where support is not provided, a child may be a risk of entering out-of-home care.

For more information see Family Preservation in the Permanency Support Program (PSP) and Framework for Family Preservation.

Why is Preservation Important for Children and Families?

We know children grow best in their own families whenever it is safely possible.

Most parents you work with will love their child and be committed to them, even when you are concerned about if they are able to care for them safely. That's why we work to strengthen families and keep them safely together. Any disruption in a child's life, even one intended to ensure their own safety, can be hugely traumatic and have negative repercussions for years or even a lifetime.

Rather than attempting to heal and restore a child after a removal, family preservation seeks to prevent removal in the first instance.

Effects of Out-Of-Home Care on Children's Outcomes

Coming into care is devastating for the child, their parents, the family and often the workers involved. The experience of being removed from family and sometimes also culture, further compounds the trauma that children may have already experienced. This can resonate for a lifetime.

Statistically, it is well documented that children in care continue to demonstrate poorer outcomes on a range of educational, health and wellbeing indicators than the general population.

Factors such as placement breakdowns, difficulties building attachment with new carers and the trauma of being removed all contribute to the poorer outcomes.

"It never goes away. Just cause we're not walking around on crutches or with bandages or plasters on our legs and arms, doesn't mean we're not hurting. Just cause you can't see it doesn't mean … I suspect I'll carry these sorts of wounds 'til the day I die. I'd just like it to be not quite as intense, that's all."

Bringing Them Home Report - Confidential evidence 580

Risk and Protective Factors in Child Abuse and Neglect

To effectively support families in PSP Family Preservation services, you must have a thorough understanding of risk and protective factors in child abuse and neglect.

Risk factors	
Individual child factors (a child is never responsible for abuse or neglect)	• low birth weight • pregnancy or birth complications • child's temperament or behaviour • child's disability

Family/parental factors	• parental substance abuse • involvement in criminal behaviour • family conflict or violence • mental health problems • child perceived as problem by parents • history of child abuse and neglect • large family size • exposure to stress • parental temperament • teenage / young parent/s • single or unsupported parents • a low level of parent education • use of corporal punishment • unplanned pregnancy • physical health problems • low self-esteem • social isolation
Social/environmental factors	• socio-economic disadvantage • parental unemployment • housing stress • lack of access to social support

	• lack of prenatal care • neighbourhood disadvantage • neighbourhood violence
Source: Child and Family Community Australia Resource Sheet (May 2017).'Risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect'. Australian Institute of Family Studies. This table in the article references the following: Black, Smith Slep & Heyman, 2001; Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Salzinger, 1998; Clément, Bérubé & Chamberland, 2016; Dubowitz et al., 2011; Forston, Klevens, Merrick, Gilbert & Alexander, 2016; Freisthler, Merrit & LaScala 2006; Li et al., 2011; Palusci, 2011; Putnam-Hornstein & Needell, 2011; Shook Slack et al., 2011; Stith et al., 2009 Wu et al., 2004)	

Protective factors	
Individual/child factors	• social and emotional competence • attachment to parent/s • connection to culture*
Family/parental factors	• strong parent/child relationship • strong cultural connection* • parental self-esteem • family cohesion • two-parent households or effective support networks • high level of parental education • self-efficacy • family functioning

	• knowledge of parenting and child development • parental resilience • concrete support for parents, including safe support people*
Social/environmental factors	• positive social connection and support • employment • neighbourhood social capital • adequate housing • socio-economically advantages neighbourhood • access to health and social services
Source: Child and Family Community Australia Resource Sheet (May 2017).'Risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect'. Australian Institute of Family Studies. This table in the article references the following: Black et al., 2001; Brown et al., 1998; Clément et al., 2016; Dubowitz et al., 2011; Forston, Klevens, Merrick, Gilbert & Alexander, 2016; Freisthler et al., 2006; Li et al., 2011; Palusci, 2011; Shook Slack et al., 2011; Stith et al., 2009	

(*) indicates information added by Curijo and not part of the original source information.

Recognising and Managing Personal Bias and Judgement

Family preservation work can be hard.

Always remember many families can experience tough times related to employment, income, substance abuse, mental and physical illness. Many of the families you will encounter will also come from a background with complex trauma and have limited available resources. They, their families and communities may have experienced generations of discrimination, racism and disadvantage.

Therefore, you may find yourself working with a parent who uses violence, self-medicates with alcohol or other drugs, is employed as a sex worker or has different hygiene standards to your own.

Last modified:
10/05/2021   Developed by Curijo, informed by DCJ information.

Page **5** of **11**

Having a reaction to someone else based on your own expectations is known as a bias.

Bias is something we all have, it is usually informed by your values, life experiences, your understanding of right and wrong, your own upbringing, and by how you'd like to see the world – especially how you'd like to see children loved and nurtured.

Bias can either be conscious, when you're aware of it and able to see beyond it, or it can be unconscious. For more information on Understanding Bias, watch this 3-minute video.

To work effectively in PSP Family Preservation, you need to be reflective and honest about the feelings you have and identify your own biases. Awareness of bias will keep the child's perspective and experience at the centre of your practice.

Practicing self-reflection will allow you to better appreciate the strengths and resilience of the family you are supporting and lead to better outcomes for children. Personal supervision and group reflective practice are two effective tools to cultivate reflection and uncover personal bias.

For more information see Reflective Practice and Group Reflective Practice.

Foundation Theories in Family Preservation

Family Preservation models can vary between agencies, but all relate to three core concepts:

- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
- Theory of Change and
- Understanding family in the context of culture.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

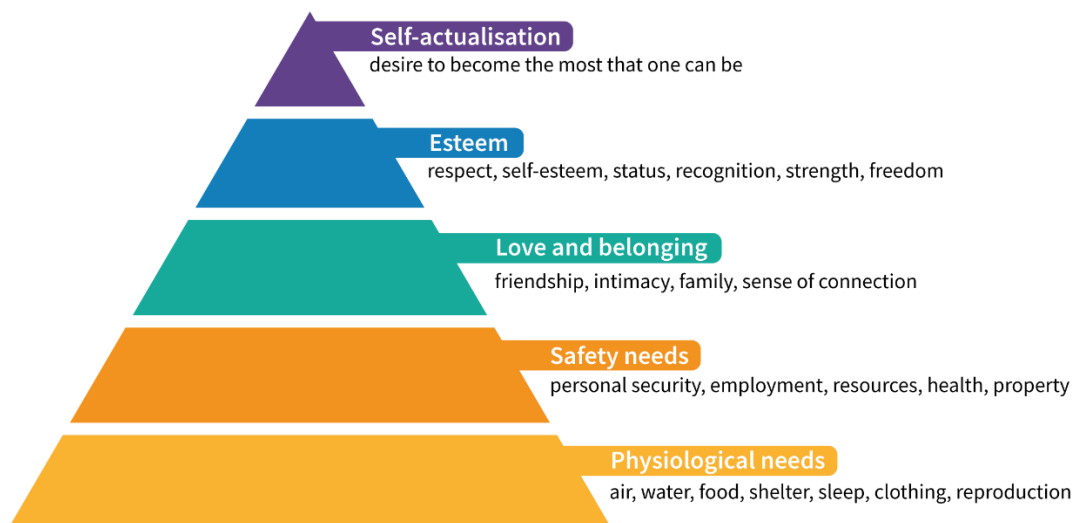According to Maslow, humans have five categories of needs:

- physiological
- safety
- love
- esteem and

Last modified: 10/05/2021   Developed by Curijo, informed by DCJ information.

Page **6** of **11**

- self-actualisation.

Maslow's theory suggests that needs in the higher stages of the hierarchy usually only emerge when people feel they have sufficiently met the lower needs. For a brief visual explanation, you can click here.

When applied to family preservation, Maslow's hierarchy of needs helps you understand what needs are motivating the parents you are working with and how to prioritise the support you provide to families.

For example, it may be very difficult for a young mother to participate in a parenting program if she doesn't have a place to live. It's important to address her physiological needs first, including shelter.

Self-actualisation
desire to become the most that one can be

Esteem
respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

Love and belonging
friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

Safety needs
personal security, employment, resources, health, property

Physiological needs
air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

'Source: Maslow 1943'

Stages of Change

The Stages of Change model recognises that people are at different stages in their readiness to change. This theory identifies five stages in the change cycle:

- pre-contemplation

- contemplation

- preparation

- action

- maintenance

- lapse.

In order to effectively engage with a parent in family preservation work, you must recognise and adapt your casework to meet them at their stage of readiness to change.

Remember during any change process, most people will experience lapses. A lapse can be important for learning and helping a parent to become stronger in their resolve to change. Alternatively, lapses can become relapses, which may mean a parent gives up trying to change.

A lapse is a slip up with a quick return to action or maintenance. A relapse is a full-blown return to the original problem behaviour.

Experiencing a lapse or a relapse is not a sign of failure or inability to recover. They mean that a parent needs to find or embed new ways of coping. The most important thing to remember is that both lapses and relapses can be overcome.

It will be helpful for you to understand that one keyway to help a person recover from a lapse or relapse, is to review the change attempt up to that point. Look at what has worked well, identify personal strengths, and then look at the obstacles or barriers for change. A person can then develop a plan to address those barriers to solve similar problems the next time they occur.
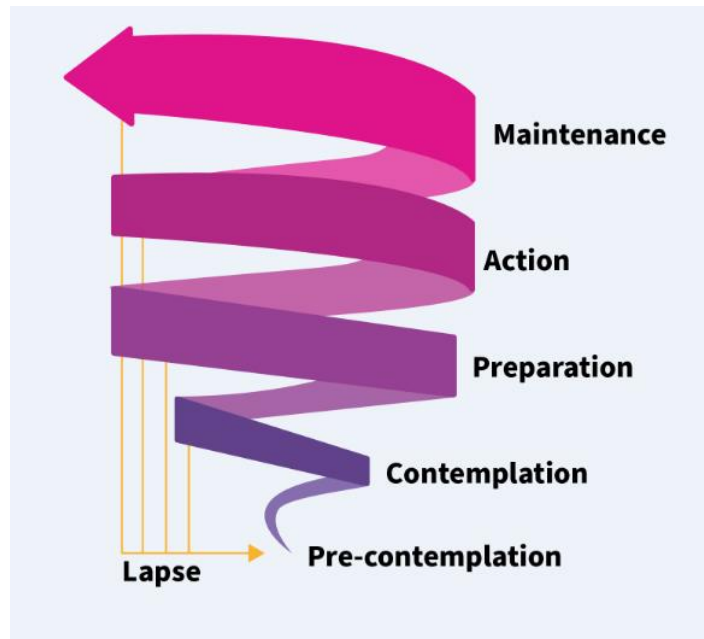
Diagram of the Stages of Change model

The diagram illustrates the stages of change model as an upward spiral process, involving progress through a series of stages until reaching "lasting exit" and sustained behavioural change.

Sourced from the Australian Government Department of Health website

For more information see Theories of Change.

Understanding Family in the Context of Culture

Family is fundamental to both personal and collective identity of Aboriginal and other children. It is from family that children receive knowledge and learn about the world and those around them. For all children, staying with family when it is safe to do so, will give them the best chance to develop a strong sense of understanding and pride about their culture. Being with family strengthens the child's connection with family, significant others and community to help promote their sense of self and cultural identity.

Preservation and Aboriginal families

Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child protection and out-of-home care systems. The reasons are complex and include historical government policies that took children away, sought to destroy their culture and enforce assimilation. The traumatic legacies of these policies are felt by Aboriginal people today and may cause them to distrust services.

Work with Aboriginal children and families must support connection to culture and always include them in case planning and decision making. Wherever possible and if desired by Aboriginal families, they can be referred to an Aboriginal PSP service provider (Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation [ACCO]). Where this is not possible, Aboriginal families should have access to an Aboriginal caseworker or the option to connect with an Aboriginal support worker from another organisation. See link Working with Indigenous children, families and communities: Lessons from practice.

Culturally Informed Practice in Preservation

Your work must support culturally safe services for children and families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. PSP service providers need to ensure a family's cultural needs are taken into consideration, which includes connecting them with support workers, community groups or services of the same cultural background.

References

Australian Institute of Family Studies.

https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/risk-and-protective-factors-child-abuse-and-neglect

Maslow, A. (1943). 'A Theory of Human Motivation'. Psychological Review, 50(4), 370-396. https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

Davis, M. (2019). 'Family is Culture: Final Report'. Independent Review into Aboriginal Out-of-Home Care in NSW.
https://www.familyisculture.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/726329/Family-Is-Culture-Review-Report.pdf

Department of Health.
https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/ncaf-cyp-oohc-toc~ncaf-cyp-oohc-1#:~:text=Children%20and%20young%20people%20in%20OOHC%20often%20have,and%20unmet%20complex%20health%20needs.&text=They%20tend%20to%20have%20poor,uptake%20compared%20to%20their%20peers

Department of Health.
https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/ncaf-cyp-oohc-toc~ncaf-cyp-oohc-appb~ncaf-cyp-oohc-appb-b2~ncaf-cyp-oohc-appb-b2-2.1

Department of Health:
https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/drugtreat-pubs-front9-wk-toc~drugtreat-pubs-front9-wk-secb~drugtreat-pubs-front9-wk-secb-3~drugtreat-pubs-front9-wk-secb-3-3#dia

Esposito, G., Nakazawa, J., Ogawa, S., Stival, R., Kawashima, A., Putnick, D. and Bornstein, M. (2014). 'Baby, You Light-Up My Face: Culture-General Pysiological Responses to Infants and Culture-General Cognitive Judgements of Adults'.
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4212966/

Bringing Them Home Report (1997). https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/the-report/part-3-consequences-of-removal/chapter-11-the-effects#the-effects-of-separation-from-the-primary-carer.