

Foundations of Restoration

Restoration is the process of safely returning a child or young person (child) to their parents after they have been removed from their care. Restoration is about families coming back together. Prioritising restoration recognises the child's basic human right to be with their parents (providing it is safe for them to do so). This right is enshrined in the [United Nations Convention of Rights of the Child](#).

Within the Permanency Support Program (PSP) this means supporting parents to make the changes required to reduce risk and increase safety so that children can be returned to their care. **Under the PSP, restoration is the priority for all children who have recently entered care.** PSP service providers are required to work in new ways with families, encouraging reflection, motivating change, building parenting skills and support networks and having important and meaningful conversations about worries and strengths. It is complex, emotional and critically important to the children, families and carers we support.

The process of restoration can be complex and varied. The process will depend on:

- if the child is entering care **or**
- if the child is in long-term care.

For more information see [Restoration Pathway for Children Entering the Care System](#) and [Restoration Legal Process from Long-Term Care \(PRM-18\)](#) .

Some restorations are only considered after children make the decision to return to live with their parents without the approval of their agency and the Children's Court (self-place home). See [things to consider if a child self-places](#).

A New Way of Working

The requirement to consider, assess and progress restorations is new for many PSP service providers.

Under the PSP, service providers are required to:

- work with a family to achieve restoration for a child whose permanency goal is restoration
- consider restoration for a child in long-term care where remaining in their current placement is no longer in their best interests.

In most situations when a child is in a long term, stable, loving home with carers, restoration will not be appropriate. The child's safety, welfare and wellbeing must be at the centre of all decisions, including regarding restoration. This is a fundamental principal of child protection and is not new.

“When a placement in care is needed the goal is reduce the length of separation between parent and child, and to maximise the prospects of reunification of children with their parents or kin whenever it is safe to do so....[as] extended periods of time in care can lead to loss of family connection, and a sense of identity, and difficulties in transitioning out of care” (Fernandez & Lee 2013).

Why Restoration is a Priority of PSP

Restoration has always been the preferred option for a child who enters care. Under the PSP there is an increased focus on considering and assessing whether a child can safely return home and supporting their family to make restorations permanent and successful.

Timeframes for Restoration

Decisions about restoration need to be made within child-centred timeframes. Children need safe, secure and stable homes to thrive. When a child enters care, caseworkers need to act with urgency to give children a permanent home as quickly as possible. The restoration process cannot be rushed, but decisions about whether restoration is realistic and how it will be supported must occur quickly. This is so the child is not harmed by failed attempts at restoration, multiple placement changes.

What is Successful Restoration Practice?

Caseworkers should work to achieve restoration where possible and in the child's best interest but great casework does not always result in the child returning home. In some cases parents may not be able to make or sustain the necessary changes to enable their child to safely return home. It can be hard to measure success. Be persistent, because establishing family connections and building healthy relationships are good for children.

For service providers, successful restoration practice involves:

- Giving families every opportunity to achieve the change needed for restoration to be possible, this includes working in collaboration with parents in a strength-based, hopeful and dignity driven way.
- Building a relationship with the child, their family and community network to help maintain and strengthen life-long connections.
- Being thorough and impartial when documenting your casework. This gives the Court (Magistrate) a full and accurate picture to inform their decision.
- Working with colleagues in other agencies, including DCJ, to arrive at a decision that is in the child's best interest.
- Being honest and transparent with the child, their parents and their carers about the restoration process and what they should expect.

Restoration and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families

Aboriginal families have a uniquely tragic and traumatic history with the child protection system. Between 1909 and 1973, Australian and state governments-initiated policies for the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families. These children were raised in orphanages, group homes or forcibly adopted with the intent of breaking their connection to family, culture and community. We cannot underestimate the ongoing outcomes of these policies and how these have impacted so many generations with loss of identity and trauma.

Today, Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in the child protection system. This over-representation is particularly disturbing as Aboriginal children and young people currently in OOHC are 10 times more likely to have their future children removed than the general population. Aboriginal children

and young people are also less likely to be restored to their families than non-Aboriginal children.

When considering permanency and restoration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families we must be aware of this history, reflect on our own bias and find culturally safe ways to engage and strengthen families.

Casework staff should also be aware that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have a different definition of restoration. The legal system considers restoration only to parents or a person who held parental responsibility. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consider children returning to live with their kin and community to also be restoration. In NSW this is not legally considered restoration; this option is instead pursued through other case planning options.

References

Fernandez, E. and Lee, J-S. (2013). 'Accomplishing family reunification for children in care: An Australian study'. *In Children and Youth Services Review*: 35. 1374-1384