

Permanency Practice Framework: Restoration, Adoption and Guardianship Brief Evidence Review

Summary Report

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Contributing authors

Dr Fiona May, Research Specialist, Parenting Research Centre

Kate Spalding, Senior Implementation Specialist, Parenting Research Centre

Matthew Burn, Implementation Specialist, Parenting Research Centre

Catherine Murphy, Senior Implementation Specialist, Parenting Research Centre

Christopher Tran, Implementation Specialist, Parenting Research Centre

Warren Cann, Chief Executive Officer, Parenting Research Centre

Annette Michaux, Director, Parenting Research Centre

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Melbourne office

Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade

East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002

Australia

Sydney office

Suite 72, Level 7

8-24 Kippax Street

Surry Hills, New South Wales, 2010

P: +61 3 8660 3500

E: info@parentingrc.org.au

www.parentingrc.org.au

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1. Introduction

The Parenting Research Centre is working in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) in NSW to develop an evidence-based practice framework to support practitioners in working towards the permanency goals of restoration, guardianship and adoption.

The aims of this project are to:

1. Explore and analyse current practice and match against the evidence.
2. Design a practice framework which aligns with evidence-based practice for families and carers of children between 0-18 years who have been placed in out-of-home care and are moving to permanency through restoration, guardianship or adoption.
3. Advise on the design and conduct of an evaluation framework.

As part of this project, a brief scan and analysis of the literature was conducted to identify the factors that contribute towards children and young people thriving in a permanent family environment. This document provides a summary of these findings from both the restoration literature and research in the area of guardianship and adoption.

Although this document aims to provide a narrative review of relevant literature including good examples of high quality evidence, it is not a systematic review and must therefore be considered with the caveat that it does not provide a complete summary of research in the field.

2. Findings

2.1 Guardianship and adoption literature

2.1.A Preparation for the role as guardian or adoptive parent

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that adequately preparing adoptive parents and guardians for their role is a critical component in ensuring positive longer-term outcomes for children and families. Preparation involves:

- Supporting parents to reflect on their expectations of guardianship or adoption (e.g., Barth & Berry, 1988; Pinderhughes, 1996; Reilly & Platz, 2003). The literature suggests that parents' views of their children and any difficulties they might be experiencing after placement are significantly influenced by parent expectations prior to adoption/guardianship, with one study finding parental perceptions to be a stronger predictor of adjustment than child behaviour (Clark, Thigpen, & Yates, 2006). There is evidence to suggest that supporting parents' cognitive appraisal of their situation helps in shaping both their future coping efforts and their overall commitment to parenting (e.g., Reilly & Platz, 2003).
- Providing accurate and up-to-date information regarding the child's needs prior to adoption (e.g., Barth & Berry, 1988; Nelson, 1985; Reilly & Platz, 2003).
- Providing support pre-placement to build parental capacity to respond to child behavioural difficulties and in supporting children who may have experienced trauma (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2008; Rushton & Monck, 2009; Simmel, 2007). In a study of children who were adopted following foster care, Simmel (2007) identified that the less prepared parents felt to support children who had externalising behaviours prior to adoption, the less able they were to regulate their own behaviours and the more likely they were to use coercive disciplinary practices, further escalating child behavioural difficulties.

2.1.B Access to services and supports

Research indicates that guardians and adoptive parents may require access to a range of formal services and supports at various points and dependent on the needs of the child or young person, with evidence to suggest that different services and supports might be required as the child grows and develops and particularly during developmental transition periods, including from childhood to adolescence, and during the transition to adulthood. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that the amount and quality of support that families receive contributes to permanency and adjustment outcomes (e.g., Barth & Berry, 1988; Erich & Leung, 2002; Houston & Kramer, 2008).

Required services most commonly reported in the literature include child and adolescent mental health services, counselling and support to respond to child emotional and behavioural difficulties (e.g., Bonin, Lushey, Blackmore, Holmes, & Beecham, 2013; Selwyn, Wijedasa, & Meakings, 2014; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009).

There is variation in the help-seeking behaviours of guardians and adoptive parents, with research suggesting that parents and guardians may require support to identify needs and access services where required (Ryan, 2011).

2.1.C Social support

The literature also suggests informal supports, including social support from friends, extended families and through community organisations such as churches or social groups play an important role in increasing parental adjustment and coping, improving family functioning and supporting positive parenting in adoptive families (e.g., Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Houston & Kramer, 2008; Erich & Leung, 2002; Reilly & Platz, 2004). Research suggests that the source of support is less important than parental perceptions regarding the adequacy of support in meeting their needs (e.g., Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005).

The role of social support has been identified as being particularly important for children with significant support needs, with evidence suggesting that adoptive parents and guardians of children

with chronic medical conditions, disability or who are experiencing significant behavioural difficulties or mental health issues may be at greater risk of chronic stress, decreased feelings of competence and increased social isolation (e.g., Armstrong, 2005).

2.1.D A warm, cohesive pattern of family interaction/communicative openness

There is evidence to suggest that warm and cohesive family environments contribute towards improved child outcomes including reduced behavioural difficulties and improved developmental outcomes in adoptive families, with one longitudinal study identifying family cohesion as a stronger predictor of positive adjustment in children than any preadoption risk factor (McGuinness & Pallansch, 2007; McGuinness & Pallansch, 2000).

Communicative openness has been described as being particularly important in adoptive families and has been identified as a significant predictor of child adjustment (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2006). Communicative openness has been defined as consisting of patterns of communication which are high in frequent, spontaneous and unconstrained conversation and high in maintaining harmony (e.g., Rueter & Koerner, 2008).

There is evidence to suggest that adoptive adolescents who perceive greater communication openness in their families report greater trust for their parents, reduced feelings of isolation and improved family functioning (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002). Research also suggests that children and young people who experience more open communication regarding their adoption, report high self-esteem and lower parent ratings of child behaviour difficulties (Brodzinsky, 2006). The literature suggests that this may be an important area for support for adoptive families (e.g., Beckett, et al., 2008; Hawkins, et al., 2007; Wrobel, Grotevant, Mendenhall, & McRoy, 2003).

2.1.E Parental coping and resilience

A further predictor of positive adoption outcomes includes the capacity of parents to cope with stress effectively, problem solve difficulties as they arise and bounce back from challenges (e.g., Ji, Brooks, Barth, & Kim, 2010). The California Long-Range Adoption Study provided evidence that adoptive families' capacity to manage stress and respond positively to challenges was linked with better psychosocial adjustments in their children. Parents who scored low on a standardized measure evaluating the family's cognitive orientation toward managing stress and challenge was a more powerful predictor of adopted children's psychosocial adjustment problems than any of the pre-adoption risk factors identified (Ji et al., 2010).

Some authors have noted that adoptive parents and guardians are at increased risk of experiencing secondary trauma and vicarious stress resulting from the trauma, abuse and neglect histories of adoptive children (e.g., Pennington, 2012) and that parents living with children who have experienced trauma may require additional support to manage stress and utilise self-care strategies.

Sensitive, responsive and positive parenting There is a large evidence base demonstrating the importance of parenting in promoting secure attachments and contributing towards positive outcomes for children and young people (e.g., Dretzke et al., 2005). In the adoption and guardianship literature, there is evidence of the positive impact of parental warmth, sensitivity and responsiveness to children's needs and feelings, positive disciplinary strategies, and active involvement with the child (e.g., Benzie & Mychasiuk, 2009; Smith-McKeever, 2005). Multiple studies have demonstrated the positive impacts of effective parenting in reducing child behavioural difficulties, and enabling children and young people with experiences of trauma to develop trusting and secure attachments to adoptive parents or guardians (e.g., Dretzke et al., 2005; Dyches, Smith, Korth, Roper, & Mandelco, 2012). There is also evidence of the impact of parenting sensitivity and responsiveness on the long-term stability of placements in the adoption and guardianship literature (e.g., Steele, Hodges, Kaniuk Hillman, & Henderson, 2003; Kaniuk, Steele, & Hodges, 2004).

There is some evidence which suggests that building adoptive parents' skills in "therapeutic parenting" may be particularly effective in supporting children to feel safe and develop attachments (Petersen, 2012).

2.1.F Children trust, feel safe and develop secure attachments to caring adults

Research suggests that children's capacity to make and sustain relationship is negatively affected by previous poor quality care (e.g., Howe, 1998). The development of a secure attachment is a reciprocal process between children and their caregivers, and attachment is shaped by both parties. Research indicates that the child's ability to accept nurturance and develop an attachment to the parents is significantly linked with adoption outcomes (e.g., Dance & Rushton, 2005). In a study of the adjustment of youth adopted from foster care in the United States, the child's ability to give and receive affection was the strongest protective factor in predicting fewer behaviour problems (Howard & Smith, 2003).

Findings from a meta-analysis by Juffer and colleagues (2007) suggests that where guardians and adoptive parents are able to create secure parent-child attachment relationships (Juffer, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2005, 2007), children and young people experience a range of benefits in terms of positive social development and positive self-esteem (e.g., Howe, 1995; Jaffari-Bimmel et al., 2006; Sharma et al., 1996; Stams et al., 2000, 2002). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that a secure attachment relationship with between children and adoptive parents may positively influence the child's later social development (Jaffari-Bimmel et al., 2006; Stams et al., 2002). Secure attachment relationships are also known to be protective against the negative effects of stress (e.g., Howe, 1995).

2.1.G Child emotional wellbeing and resilience

There is evidence to suggest that adopted children may be at greater risk for developmental, physical, psychological, emotional or behavioural difficulties as a result of early neglect or maltreatment (e.g., Rosenthal, Schmidt and Conner, 1988; Simmel, Brooks, Barth & Hinshaw, 2001). Protective factors in children and families (such as parents having realistic expectations and thorough adoption preparation, open communication and warm, positive parenting style, as well as support from extended family and others) can buffer the impact of adverse beginnings, help prevent and resolve issues, and enhance resilience (e.g., Smith, 2010). There is also evidence in support of the benefits of positive parent-child relationship, in promoting improved social and emotional functioning (e.g., Bell, 2013; Cheung et al., 2011). Other factors identified in the literature as contributing towards increased resilience in adopted children include connections to community and education, social support, self-reflection and emotional regulation (Hurley et al., 2013; Meng et al., 2018).

2.1.H Engagement in education

The research suggests that supporting child engagement in education is important to ensuring positive developmental outcomes, as children can experience behaviours and learning difficulties associated with an early trauma history that require additional support and parental collaboration with educators (Pennington, 2012). Early intervention programs can improve cognitive development in young children who are at particular risk. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2004) findings indicated that high quality pre-school education led to better intellectual and social functioning during early school years. Schools which are most effective in helping children who have experienced adversity provide a caring and supportive environment, have high but reasonable expectations of students and offer opportunities for meaningful participation within school structures (Hurley et al., 2013).

2.1.I Connection to birth family

There is evidence to suggest that connections to birth family are important in supporting the development of a sense of identity and a sense of belonging or connectedness in children and young people (e.g., Biehal, 2014). Longitudinal adoption research suggests that children and young people are most likely to experience benefits from connections with their birth family when their adoptive parents have an open attitude toward contact and when birth parents accept the placement and the child's connections to both families (Neil et al., 2015). This requires a relationship-building process that includes negotiating boundaries, managing feelings, developing open communication, and having empathy and respect for each other (Collings, 2018; Grotevant,

Ross, Marchel, & McRoy, 1999). There is research evidence which suggests that higher degrees of collaboration in the adoptive kinship network are associated with better adjustment during middle childhood (Grotevant, Ross, Marchel, & McRoy, 1999).

Adoptive parents play a crucial role in helping children understand their adoption and in discussing adoption-related information to enable their children to make sense of their history and experience. Adoptive parents also facilitate the direct contact between adoptees and birth family members (e.g., Luu et al., 2018). There is evidence to suggest that the relationship between contact with birth parent and the development of a strong sense of identity in young people is mediated by the conversations that adoptive parents or guardians have with young people in relation to their birth families – how guardians and adoptive parents talk about birth families with young people is important to their sense of identity (Luu et al., 2018; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011).

To support birth families to maintain connection, a range of strategies have been suggested in the literature including:

- Case worker support needs to be “empowering, sensitive and facilitate communication between birth parents and adoptive parents” (Siegel & Smith, 2012).
- Practitioners to acknowledge the important role of the birth family in young people’s lives.
- Provide support for guardians or adoptive parents in understanding the importance of the child’s attachment to their birth family or need for information about their identity. Provide support/guidance to guardians/adoptive parents in how they might talk with the child/young person regarding their birth family and any contact they might have.
- Thorough consultation between all parties about contact plans, in order to ensure that issues are fully explored prior to placement. Consider timing of initial contact, frequency of contact, location – these are highly individual and should be negotiated dependent on the best interests of each child/young person.
- Importance of child voice.
- Support/resources provided to birth parents to facilitate ongoing contact – addressing parent-identified needs with focus on building parenting capacity; information about services and supports; emotional support/counselling (self-compassion/self-care focus).
- Ongoing role of agency in coordinating and facilitating on-going contact even after adoption has been finalised, with the goal of “promoting the self-determination of adoptive and birth families to negotiate mutually beneficial arrangements” (Siegel & Smith, 2012).
- Cultural training to support non-Aboriginal workers (e.g., Macaskill, 2002; Tregagle, Smith & Voigt, 2003).

2.1.J Sense of belonging/connection to culture and community

There is some evidence to suggest that where adoptive parents and guardians are supportive of the relationship between children and young people and their birth parents, their relationship with the child/young person is subsequently strengthened, with children/young people experiencing a greater sense of belonging (Ward, Moggach, Tregagle & Trivedi, 2020).

Where adoptive parents/guardians support and facilitate contact between children/young people and their birth parents (even when this can be an emotionally challenging experience), some parents describe the process of becoming “honorary members of an extended family” – to the further benefit of children and young people (Ward, Moggach, Tregagle & Trivedi, 2020).

In a recent Australian study (Luu et al., 2018) children and young people described a sense of belonging to their adopted families which the authors hypothesised “may contribute to their well-being and allow them a nurturing space by which they can develop a positive identity”.

The research suggests that finding safe spaces for children to connect with their background and cultural heritage has been a practice gap in child protection services generally (e.g., Commission for Children and Young People, 2016) but is essential for improving the wellbeing of children and young people (e.g., Noble-Carr, Barker, McArthur, 2013).

Recommended strategies to increase sense of connectedness to culture identified in the literature include:

- Acknowledge the important role of the birth family in young people's lives
- Support the development and maintenance of caring connections with birth parents and cultural support networks
- Facilitate opportunities for participation and engagement with community
- Promote and facilitate hope for the future
- Training to increase cultural competence for non-Aboriginal workers when supporting Aboriginal children and young people (e.g., Noble-Carr, Barker, & McArthur, 2013; Kelly & Sinclair, 2005; Commission for Children and Young People, 2016; McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot, & Wigley, 2011).

2.1.K Sense of identity

There is evidence to suggest that identity is a strong predictor of wellbeing, and that it connects to the broader construct of self, consisting of concepts such as self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy. Research suggests the formation of a healthy identity in adopted children and adolescents is important because it will have a broad influences on other aspects of their lives, including how well-adjusted they are, how they view themselves and how they feel about themselves (e.g., De Rosnay, 2016). Having a network of 'caring connections' through positive contacts with birth parents, and strong relationships with guardians/adoptive parents has been identified as being central to the development of a strong sense of self (e.g., de Souza, Cartwright, & McGilp, 2004).

Positive contact with birth parents has been identified as supporting the development of a sense of identity for children and young people – having information about their birth family's background and 'meaning making' is important (e.g., Luu, de Rosnay, Wright, & Tregeagle, 2018; Macaskill, 2002; Von Korff et al., 2008). There is some evidence to indicate that this can contribute towards improved outcomes into adulthood also (Ward, Moggach, Tregeagle & Trivedi, 2020). Contact with siblings has also been identified as an important contributor towards the development of a sense of identity (e.g., Luu et al., 2018).

2.2 Restoration literature

2.2.A Access to services and supports

Consistent with the guardianship and adoption evidence-base, there is strong evidence in the restoration literature regarding the importance of access to appropriate services and supports as needed. The literature describes access to services and supports as being important for both birth parents (e.g., Yampolskaya, Armstrong, Strozier & Swanke, 2017) and carers (e.g., Bromfield, 2007) in order to improve restoration outcomes.

Many studies have highlighted the need for ongoing support and timely access to services for birth parents (e.g., Delfabbro, Barber & Cooper, 2003; Fernandez, 1996; O'Neill, 2005; Scott & Honner, 2003), including the provision of practical assistance and support to address physical, health and safety needs (e.g., Fraser, Lewis, Walton, Pecora, & Walton, 1996; Wahler & Dumas, 1989), advocacy and legal services (Fernandez & Lee, 2013), financial and housing support (Becker, Jordan, & Larsen, 2007; Cheng & Li, 2012; Courtney, 1995; Jones, 1998; Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2003; Shaw, 2006), interventions to address mental health issues, domestic violence and substance abuse (e.g., Brook & McDonald, 2009; Fernandez & Lee, 2013; Risley-Curtiss, Stromwall, Hunt, & Teska, 2004; Shaw, 2006; Vanderploeg et al., 2007; Yampolskaya et al., 2017) and support to develop parenting capacity (e.g., Festinger, 1996; Terling, 1999).

There is evidence to suggest that parents who fully use services are more likely to reunify than those who only partially participate or do not participate (D'Andrade & Nguyen, 2014). Furthermore, supports that aim to engage and empower birth parents have been demonstrated to assist parents in maintaining contact with their children and working towards personal change and family

reunification (Thomson & Thorpe, 2003). The importance of providing on-going support services to birth parents was emphasised by Delfabbro et al. (2003) as changes in their wellbeing was the most critical predictor of early reunification. Fernandez and Lee (2013) also emphasised the importance of continuation of services for children once they had been restored.

There is also evidence to suggest that foster carers may sometimes feel dissatisfied with the support provided to them (e.g., Bromfield, 2007), with the following areas identified as being important: the provision of information regarding eligibility for benefits and financial support, increased information and support from caseworkers, more training and supervision in the carer role, and increased access to support services and respite as required (e.g., Butcher, 2005; McHugh et al., 2004).

2.2.B Social support for birth parents

Consistent with the guardianship and adoption literature, social support has also been identified as being important in improving restoration outcomes, with evidence suggesting that successful reunifications are more likely in families who seek and maintain an appropriate support system (e.g., Fernandez & Lee, 2013; Festinger, 1996; Terling, 1999). There is evidence to suggest that many families experience social isolation with limited support networks prior to entering the child protection system (e.g., Fernandez & Lee, 2013). Social support has been described as providing a 'safety net' for parents both before and after reunification and also been identified as being important in maintaining healthy family functioning (Lietz, Lacasse, & Cacciato, 2011). It is suggested that supporting birth parents to strengthen their support networks and building community partnerships provides informal and formal opportunities for families to deal with stresses increasing the likelihood of positive restoration outcomes.

A warm, cohesive pattern of family interaction/communicative opennessThe restoration literature also provides evidence in support of the role of warm and cohesive patterns of family interactions, with research indicating that poor patterns of family communication can serve as a barrier to achieving reunification (e.g., Davis & Ellis-MacLeod, 1994; Lawder, Poulin, & Andrews, 1986; Lindsey, 1994). For many families, reunification involves processes of rebuilding trust, re-establishing positive family rituals and traditions and strengthening attachments (Yampolskaya et al., 2017).

2.2.C Parental coping and resilience

Consistent with the guardianship and adoption literature, there is strong evidence in the restoration literature regarding the importance of parental coping and resilience in achieving positive restoration outcomes for children and families (e.g., Benedict & White, 1991; Carnochan, Rizik-Baer & Austin, 2013; Risley-Curtis et al., 2004; Vanderploeg et al., 2007). Research suggests that children of parents with substance abuse issues tend to have longer stays in care (Benedict & White, 1991; Vanderploeg et al., 2007; Yampolskaya et al., 2017). Similarly, parents experiencing mental health issues face challenges to reuniting with their children that may result in non-reunification and prolonged stays in care for their children (Choi et al., 2012; Risley-Curtiss, Stromwall, Hunt, & Teska, 2004). Having access to appropriate services and interventions to support parents to manage stress, build resilience and increase coping capacity is associated with improved restoration outcomes (e.g., Choi et al., 2012).

2.2.D Sensitive, responsive and positive parenting

There is a large evidence-base describing the importance of parenting capacity in achieving reunification (e.g., Costa, 2016; Franks et al., 2013; Lietz & Strength, 2011). The capacity of birth parents to recognise, prioritise and respond appropriately to children's social, emotional, physical and safety needs has been identified as one of the most important predictors of positive restoration outcomes (Donald & Jureidini, 2004; Franks et al., 2013; Lietz & Strength, 2011).

There is also strong evidence to suggest that supporting birth parents to build their parenting capacity significantly improves restoration outcomes for children and families (Fraser et al, 1996). Effective parenting interventions have focused on strategies that increase parental insight, emphasise the parent's capacity to change, build on strengths, improve communication and

problem solving, and increase self-regulation capacity (Costa, 2016; Fraser et al., 1996; Lietz & Strength, 2011). Parenting interventions for birth parents have also been demonstrated as having positive effects on the parent-child relationship, contributing towards further benefits in relation to child wellbeing (Franks et al., 2013).

There is also evidence to suggest that the provision of parenting support to foster carers may also contribute towards improved reunification outcomes. It is suggested that where carers are able to effectively respond to children's behavioural difficulties leading to a reduction in behaviours, reunification is subsequently more likely (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, & Landsverk, 2008).

2.2.E Children trust, feel safe and develop secure attachments to caring adults

The restoration literature provides evidence of the importance of children experiencing a loving and secure bond with the caring adults in their lives (including with birth parents and foster carers) (Costa, 2016; Holmes, 2014; Nesmith, Patton, Christophersen, & Smart, 2017). Qualitative research conducted by Mason and Gibson (2004) supports these findings, with children and young people identifying as their primary emotional need, the importance of being loved and having someone there for them. Children also described the importance of not only being "cared about" but also "cared for" by the adults in their lives.

There is also evidence to suggest that the quality, consistency and duration of birth parent/child contact prior to reunification are critical factors that contribute towards positive restoration outcomes (e.g., Ankersmit, 2016; Biehal, 2007; Fernandez & Lee, 2013; Tsang, Leibowitz, Spence, & Scott, 2005).

2.2.F Child emotional wellbeing and resilience

Consistent with the guardianship and adoption literature, there is evidence in the restoration literature to suggest that child behaviours and emotional wellbeing are strong predictors of restoration outcomes (e.g., Carnochan, 2013; Fisher, Burraston & Pears, 2005; Jones, 1998; Potter and Klein-Rothschild, 2002). There is also a large evidence-base which describes an increased incidence of psychosocial and behavioural difficulties in children in out of home care (e.g., Clausen, Landsverk, Ganger, Chadwick, & Litrownik, 1998; Pilowsky, 1995), which may be related to experiences of abuse, neglect or trauma (Delfabbro, Barber, & Cooper, 2002). Research suggests that children who experience stability in their placement have greater resilience (e.g., Fanshel, Finch, & Grundy, 1990), as compared to children who experience multiple placements who are at greater risk for poor social, psychological, and academic adjustment, and lower rates of restoration with their birth families.

These findings underscore the importance of providing appropriate support to carers and birth parents in building parenting capacity to respond effectively to child behavioural difficulties and to support healthy child development. They also reiterate the importance of ensuring access to professional services and supports as required in order to achieve improved restoration outcomes.

2.2.G Engagement in education

As described earlier in this review, the importance of high quality early learning and educational opportunities in supporting child development and contributing towards improved social, emotional and cognitive outcomes has been well established in the literature (e.g., Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009).

Research into the educational experiences of children in care has highlighted the importance of supporting children's positive engagement in education to improve outcomes (e.g., Delfabbro & Barber, 2003). Research suggests that children in care are less likely than other children to continue their education beyond the minimum school leaving age as well as experiencing substantial educational disruption (CREATE Foundation, 2005).

2.2.H Connection with birth parents

The restoration literature also provides evidence of the benefits associated with contact between children in care and their birth parents, including increased rates of reunification and reductions in

the amount of time spent in care (Delfabbro et al., 2002a). There is some evidence to suggest that child characteristics (including the presence of behavioural difficulties) influence the degree of birth family contact and the likelihood of reunification (Delfabbro et al., 2002a).

2.2.I Sense of belonging and identity/connection to culture and community

In addition to increasing the likelihood of reunification, contact between children and their birth families has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the sense of belonging and identity of children in care. Birth family contact may refer to contact between children in care and their birth parents, birth siblings or extended family (Ainsworth & Maluccio, 2002).

Research with young people in care suggests that issues of family and identity are of importance to young people and can present challenges in terms of negotiating roles and relationships with birth parents and carers (O'Neill, 2004). Researchers have suggested the importance of maximising opportunities for connection with both carers and birth parents (Gardner, 2004) in order to strengthen the network of caring relationships around the young person and increase their sense of belonging and connection.

There is also evidence in the restoration literature which suggests that services that support Aboriginal children in remaining connected with their cultural identity and extended family may decrease the inequities faced by Aboriginal children in OOHC and lead to increase in reunification rates (Prasad & Connolly, 2013). The strategies for increasing sense of connectedness to culture in the restoration literature are consistent with those described in the guardianship and adoption literature and include support to develop connections with cultural support networks, creating opportunities for engagement with community, promoting a sense of hope for the future, and cultural competence training for staff (e.g., Noble-Carr, Barker, & McArthur, 2013; Kelly & Sinclair, 2005; Commission for Children and Young People, 2016; McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot, & Wigley, 2011).

2.2.J Strong practitioner-carer-birth parent relationship

There is a growing body of evidence in the restoration literature describing the importance of the relationship between practitioners, carers and birth parents in improving restoration outcomes (Ankersmit, 2016; Fernandez & Lee, 2013; Toros, DiNitto & Tiko, 2018; Panozzo et al., 2007; Yampolskaya et al., 2017).

There is evidence of more timely restoration when practitioners support birth parents in participating in child-related planning, decisions and activities (Cheng, 2010). Caseworkers who meet regularly with birth parents are more likely to gain their trust and be perceived by parents as treating them with greater respect (Fernandez, 2012). A relationship premised on trust, mutual respect and negotiated guidance has been identified as being critical to ensuring positive restoration outcomes (e.g., Scott & Honner, 2003).

The relationship between carer and parent has also been identified as being essential in contributing towards positive outcomes for children and young people and can provide opportunities for the modelling of effective parenting techniques, which can assist parents in learning strategies for responding to their children (e.g., Ankersmit, 2016). There is evidence for a supportive approach based on open contracting between foster carers and parents to reach clarity in the relationship, define responsibilities and establish trust. Other studies have found that while some foster carers may be willing to participate in restoration work, not all carers are of the view that supporting parents is part of their role (Thorpe, 2007). Research also suggests that carers who are not actively involved in the restoration process are more likely to resist restoration for a number of reasons, including protectiveness towards the child and scepticism about parents' caring capacity (Tsang et al., 2005). Research suggests that parents and carers are more likely to collaborate if they:

- have trust in the restoration process and the people involved;
- are motivated and willing to participate and collaborate;

- have sufficient knowledge about each other, about the restoration process, and about how to collaborate; and
- agree with the restoration objective, with the idea of collaboration, and that these objectives are in the best interest of the child (Lewis & Callaghan, 1993).

2.2.K Child voice and involvement

There is evidence which suggests improved outcomes for children and young people who are actively involved in their own preparation for returning home, however, research suggests that many children and young people often feel they do not have a say in decisions relating to their care (Mateos, Vaquero, Balsells & Ponce, 2017). Other researchers have identified that being involved in the process and feeling heard by important adults in their lives can improve outcomes for children and young people, increasing feelings of empowerment and improving self-esteem (Delfabbro, Barber, & Bentham, 2002; Mason & Gibson, 2004).

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Parenting Research Centre

Sydney Office
Suite 72, Level 7, 8-24 Kippax Street
Surry Hills
New South Wales, 2010
Australia
P: +61 418 423 283
E: info@parentingrc.org.au
W: www.parentingrc.org.au

Melbourne office
Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne
Victoria 3002
Australia
p. + 61 03 8660 3500