

Relative and Kinship Care Assessment

When a child or young person (child) cannot live with their parents, the next best person to care for them is usually a member of their family or kin who can care for them safely.

Placement with family and kin can reduce the trauma of being in out-of-home care (OOHC) and help a child develop or maintain connection to family, community and culture.

Relative care is a type of care that places a child with a member of their extended family, such as a grandparent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, cousin, niece, nephew, uncle or aunt.

Kinship care is where a child is cared for by a person who is not a relative, but has an established relationship with the child and or the child's family and they share a cultural, tribal and/or community connection that is recognised by the child's family and community.

Even when a particular family member or kin might not be the best person to be their primary carer, they may be authorised as a formal respite carer. Sometimes families choose to offer informal support and care.

Permanency Support Program (PSP) providers carry out assessments of relative and kinship carers. This can be at the request of Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) or because you have found family to care for a child.

Benefits of Relative and Kinship Care

Research suggests when children are cared for by a relative or kin, their care is generally more stable and their wellbeing is improved (Kiryaly 2015). Placement with relative or kin carers can reduce the trauma of removal. When a child is removed, they may lose everything they are familiar with such as their parents, their home,

their routine, their friends and their school. Living with someone who knows them can reduce a child's feelings of loss and confusion and provide a sense of comfort to the child in times of stress and trauma.

Relatives and kin can help maintain a child's connections with family, community and culture, now, and into the future. They are also likely to already have a good understanding of the child and their world.

Relative and kinship carers are often willing and able to care for sibling groups.

Special Considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

An Aboriginal child's placement must be made in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles. In particular the placement hierarchy established by the Care Act (section 13) - when an Aboriginal child is unable to live with their parents, the preferred placement option is for the child to live with a member of their extended family or kin.

Talk with children, parents, family, community members and Aboriginal colleagues to help you identify people in the children's network who could care for them. You should use Aboriginal family led decision making processes to ensure self-determination and allow families opportunities to lead the decisions around the best placement for their child.

Further information can be found in the [Aboriginal Case Management Policy](#) and [Practice Guidance](#).

What is Different with Relative and Kinship Care Assessments?

Family relationships and dynamics

The significant difference with relative and kin assessments is the strong focus and analysis that you will need to do in regard to family relationships and dynamics (in comparison to [Foster Care Assessment](#)). Your assessment needs to consider the strengths of a relative and kin placement with any risks that family relationships may pose, such as difficulties with boundaries with parents.

For Aboriginal children and families, it is important to use Aboriginal family led assessment to ensure assessment is culturally appropriate and safe. Use a culturally appropriate assessment (e.g. the Winangay Kinship Carer Assessment Tool) if your

agency has access to one. Otherwise, ensure you apply a cultural lens to your assessment either by collaborating with an Aboriginal colleague or contacting an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation.

Support for the authorisation process

You may need to provide extra support to applicants for a number of reasons:

- caring for the child/ren of a family member may be unexpected
- the process they must go through to become a carer may be daunting
- they may have negative perceptions of the child protection system because of involvement they, their family and community have had
- they may be managing family dynamics during the authorisation process.

Take extra time to explain the issues and process, seek to understand their worries and provide reassurance about both the application process and the nature of caring for a relative or kin. Be sensitive and empathic, while being clear and honest. Consider cultural issues and provide any documents in a culturally appropriate way. Help applicants to understand the information you provide.

Probity checks

For some families, particularly Aboriginal or migrant families, the mandatory probity checks and screening of other household members can be a sensitive issue. (For information on probity checks see below or [Foster Care Assessment](#)).

It may take a number of visits and phone calls to help explain the involvement of other household members in the process and how this will be carried out.

This is because they may have had negative experiences with over policing or a distrust in government authorities. For Aboriginal families, Australia's history of colonisation, the stolen generation and past government policies have had long lasting impacts and continue to affect generations today. Consider working with a relevant Cultural and Linguistic Diverse (CALD) or Aboriginal Agency for the assessment.

While some probity issues may mean that a person is automatically disqualified (e.g. WWCC bar), just because a probity check may raise an issue, it doesn't mean that a particular family may not be suitable, especially if the event was long ago. Use professional judgement, honest conversations with the applicant/s, reflection and critique with colleagues to help you make judgements. All agencies will have a robust

process for considering and approving applications. Discuss any concerns and safety plans with your management.

Remember that no one is likely to be a perfect carer (just like there aren't perfect parents). Your assessment is to ascertain whether they will be able to provide adequate care, meet the needs of the child and to make sure they won't pose a risk to a child. Talk with your colleagues, manager or the Office of the Children's Guardian if there are issues that are worrying you. Raise them openly and respectfully with the family or kin. Be careful to check your cultural and other biases.

See: [Reflective Practice](#) to help with this.

Assessment Process

Relative and kin carers must undergo a thorough, lawful assessment process prior to their authorisation. You will find that this is very similar to the [Foster Care Assessment](#) process. Foster care assessments can be undertaken by caseworkers (both DCJ and PSP) or contracted assessors.

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 finalized as part of the analysis that forms your final recommendation and report.

Your role as a PSP caseworker is to:

- explain the process assist the applicant to complete a relative or kin carer application form
- support applicants through the process
- obtain relevant documentation such as medical, probity and referees
- carry out a home safety inspection
- ensure all probity checks are undertaken
- conduct face-to-face interview/s
- provide preauthorization training or arrange for applicants to attend this training
- analyse and reflect on information gathered throughout the process
- gather information about a relative or kin's family history
- support your agency to make an informed decision about whether the relative or kin should be authorized, and if there should be any conditions.

inform the applicant, including providing reasons if you decided not to authorise them.

Probity and Suitability Checks:

Agencies must conduct probity and suitability checks for applicants and certain household members including:

- identity check.
- Working with Children check (WWCC) (18 years and over)
- [NSW Police - Criminal History Check](#). (for applicants and 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 Community Services Check, for a form and further information [Click here](#). This form should be emailed to CSCheck@fac.s.nsw.gov.au

Face-to-face interviews

Applicants should be interviewed face-to-face by a caseworker or an independent assessor.

The assessment should include the following topics:

- the views of the child
- the relationship between the child and potential carer/s (the applicant/s)
- understanding of the child protection concerns and ability to maintain the child's safety
- ability to support safe relationships and time with parents and other family without compromising the child's safety
- general information about the applicant's health, lifestyle and work commitments
- the home environment
- the applicant's mental health/wellbeing and disabilities
- the applicant's parenting values, attitudes, practices and experience
- the applicant's education and schooling
- family dynamics and relationships within the household
- dynamics and relationship with the child's parents

- willingness to work with you, your agency and other professionals
- understanding of the impact of abuse, neglect, grief and loss and associated trauma on childhood development
- cultural awareness, religion, worldwide views
- impact that caring duties will have on other children that live in the house
- the applicant's support network and relationship with the community.

Applicants should be informed about the following:

- [Code of Conduct](#) for authorised foster, relative and kinship carers. They need to sign they have read and understood the document. Some agencies have their own Code of Conduct
- [NSW Charter of Rights](#) for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW.
- Independent support and assistance for relative and kin families including [My Forever Family](#) My Forever Family NSW and AbSec (where appropriate).
- The importance of a child's holistic family heritage and cultural identity.
- The importance of supporting the relationship between a child and both families (where safe to do so).
- Understanding of the impact of abuse, neglect, grief and loss and associated trauma on childhood behaviour and development.
- Supporting a child with trauma, challenging behaviours and stress
- Life Story work
- Where to seek general information, help and support (discussed below).

Analysis and recommendation

Your final report should analyse all the information you have gathered throughout the assessment process in a succinct, balanced and honest way, which supports the recommendation.

Make sure you have:

- included the views of the child/ren
- centred the analysis on how the placement will affect the child
- included how an applicant will work with you, other caseworkers, family and other people in the child's life

- identified the strengths of family or kin care balanced with any risks that the family dynamics or relationships may posed to the child
- identified the supports you can provide the applicant to help them care for the child
- considered what role other family members can take.

Provisional Assessments

Sometimes you will need to place a child with a family member or kin at short notice. A briefer relative or kinship (or other person the child knows) assessment can be conducted and the person authorised a provisional basis. This enables the child to live with their relative or kin immediately while you conduct a full authorisation of the person. The carer should be fully authorised within three months of their provisional authorisation.

Before a child is placed with a member of their family or kin, a caseworker must undertake the following preliminary steps and probity checks:

- ensure the relative or kin has completed an application form
- undertaken a suitability assessment (detailed below)
- undertaken probity checks (discussed in detail above)
- carried out a home safety inspection.

Your organisation may have a template or checklist for provisional authorizations. The Office of the Children’s Guardian also provides a [template](#).

Probity Checks

Applicants must complete suitability check including:

- checking ID
- Working with Children check (WWCC)

If a relative or kin or an adult household member does not have a WWCC, they must apply straight away and give the PSP Service provider a copy of the WWCC application as proof of applying.

- Criminal record check (see below)

- A check of DCJ records (see below)

PSP Service Provider can ring NSW Police and DCJ (Community Services Centre) for them to give you verbal information about child protection or criminal risks (under Chapter 16A). You should follow this up with a written 16A form. Chapter 16A of the Care Act allows information affecting the safety of a child to be exchanged between prescribed bodies. For further information on when to use a [16A or 16A form](#).

A National Criminal Record check and full Community Services check must be completed as part of the full authorisation process (see full assessment).

Suitability assessments

Provisional assessments need to establish that the relative or kin has the capabilities and suitability to care for the child (prior to full authorisation).

Issues to consider include:

- their relationship with the child
- views of the child
- attitudes towards the abuse and/or neglect of the child including their ability to keep the child safe
- their relationship to child's parents and whether they can safely manage unplanned contact
- anything in the home environment that might pose a risk to the child
- willingness/ability to attend medical and other appointments the child needs
- any risks to the child.

Follow up assessments for full authorisation should include all assessment elements as well as an assessment of how the placement has been going.

You should also be looking to what supports you need to provide to the carer/s so that they can help the child to thrive.

For More 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 Carers](#) and [Becoming a Carer](#).

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

Please see: [Foster Care Assessment](#) for further information.

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

Office of the Children’s Guardian’s [fact sheet](#) about assessment.

Information on carer 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](#) for further information.

References:

Australians Together. (n.d). Indigenous Kinship. Retrieved from <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/kinship>

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, (Section 13). Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1998/157/chap2/part2/sec13>

Kiraly, M. (2015). A review of kinship carer surveys: The Cinderella of the care system? *Child Family Community Australia*, 31. 1-28. Retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca-paper31.pdf>