

# Supporting Children and Young People in Restoration

Returning to the care of their parents after being removed, and being away for some time, can be a complex experience for a child or young person (child). It is often characterised by big changes and big emotions, such as fear, grief and hope. A child may struggle to identify and express what they are feeling and may feel conflicting emotions about returning to live with their parents, especially if they have experienced trauma. Children may not feel their voice is being heard and may also be worried about being safe once they go home.

Children will need support to:

- identify, understand and process their feelings and experiences that led to their removal
- feel safe enough to express their worries and wishes
- have their voice heard and actioned in decision making
- adjust in the transition home and changing relationships
- adjust to any differences in cultural practices between their carers and family

Giving support to the child gives them the greatest chance of successfully returning and staying safe at home. To do this, you will need to spend time with the child to gain a clear understanding of their views and needs, including their cultural needs. Most children removed from their parents will tell you they want to go home, and they will mean it, but they may also carry unexpressed grief, hurt and anger from before they were removed. To compound this, parents may not understand or remember all the specific events that have hurt their child.

Depending on the age of the child, prepare them for possible changes in routine. Explain that Mum and Dad might have different rules and let them do different things to the carer. Talk to them about safety in a developmentally appropriate way and what do they do if they do not feel safe.

See [Supporting Parents in Restoration](#).

## Understanding Removal

Take time to talk with children, ask them about their experience of being removed and listen to understand their story. This will help you plan their restoration and focus on the needs of the child. An essential part of supporting a child in restoration is supporting them to understand:

- the worries and concerns that led to them being unsafe and removed
- what was happening for their parents or family that led to those problems
- that it was not their fault that they were hurt or removed from their parents
- that it is okay to have enjoyed or loved their carer and that does not mean that they do not love their parent
- what has changed at home and what needs to happen before they can go home, including what they feel needs to be different
- any worries or fears they, and others have about their parents or family and what everyone is doing to make sure they (and their siblings) will be kept safe
- what might happen next
- how they can be involved in planning and making decisions about going home
- that it's okay to feel whatever they are feeling.

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The aim is to help children to not only be safe but to **feel** safe.

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## Participation in Decision Making

Children are capable of, and have a right to, participate in decisions about their life. Don't assume they are too young, disinterested or they aren't developmentally ready. Even young children can tell and show you what makes them feel safe and unsafe. Be curious about what the child is telling you, ask questions, clarify meaning, help them name and understand their feelings. Do not forget to encourage the child to talk about hopes for their future.

Let children know that their views will be an important part of decision making and plans about their life. Be honest tell them that you also need to listen to other views and information, so that best decisions are made for them.

When you are talking to a child about going home, understand they may feel confused about where they want to live and afraid of hurting people's feelings. Let them know that their views are important, and it is normal to feel confused or conflicted about where they want to live and their relationships. Provide lots of opportunities over time for them to express what they are thinking or feeling and understand that children's views may change over time too. Use child friendly language and keep them up to date on your decisions, ensure you follow through with communication, even if there are delays with the process.

A great external resource for tools and approaches to working with children are available to download at *Kids Central Toolkit*.

When talking to children about restoration:

- Schedule home visits or case plan meetings outside of school hours so that the child can attend.
- Be warm, respectful, open and non-judgemental.
- Help the child to bring a support person with them to meetings if this would make them feel more comfortable.
- Ask the child what their thoughts and feelings are about going home; explore their fears and worries as well as hopes for the future
- Use tools and activities to explore what a child would like their life and relationships to be like when they go home. What changes they would need in order to feel safe. It can be helpful to break the day down into specific time period like morning, lunchtime, afternoon, evening.
- Think about the best way of communicating with the child; consider options like role play, drawing, painting or song writing or use specifically designed engagement tools like the [Three Houses Tool](#)

Develop the child's OOHC case plan with the child and make sure they have a copy, ensure this is written in language they understand or make a version especially for them.

- Involve children in developing the Family Action Plan for change.
- Let the child know how you have used the information they have provided to make decisions

- If the child does not want to talk to you, this is ok too; just spending time with the child and watching how they interact with others can help you understand their needs. Persist and continue to show them that you are interested in them and care.

## Understanding Children's Rights

An important part of your role in supporting a child to return to the care of their parents is to ensure they understand their right to feel safe and protected.

The Kids Central Toolkit [Keep Me Safe](#) is an excellent resource to help caseworkers uphold the child's rights. Talk with the child about their rights, in age appropriate manner, see the Character of Rights available on the PSP Learning Hub.

## Helping Children Understand and Cope with Change

Help the child understand what it might be like when they do go home. Explain to them that the home they are returning to may not be the same as the one they were removed from. There may be changes, new siblings at home, different routines and their parents may act and look differently. Explain that their parents have been working hard to make some positive changes to make them safe. Give the child opportunities to experience periods at home as they transition, this may be for shorter periods that become longer in the lead up to their return.

A child may need to change schools or be leaving behind friends and facing the uncertainty of making new ones. A child will also be leaving a carer, their family and home. The child is likely to have bonded with the family and experienced safety, predictable care and often more resources. It can be difficult for a child to express any feelings of loss they may feel after returning home, out of loyalty to their parents and fear of hurting their feelings.

Talk with the child and carer about how they might like to stay in touch. Honour their relationship.

A child may also feel excited, nervous and scared about going home. They may not know how to show these conflicting emotions to their carer as they are preparing to return to their parents. These emotions can impact on a child's behaviour, which in

turn can impact on the behaviour and attitudes of carers and parents who do not understand what the behaviours means.

Sometimes carers may assume that the child's behaviours mean that they do not want to return home. The child may sometimes express this, thinking this is what their carer wants to hear. It is important not to make assumptions about the child's behaviour. Stay open, curious and continue to connect with the child in ways that suit their age, needs, culture and any disability.

## Building a Support Network for the Child

Build a network around the child so they know who they can to for help.

Children and their parents require a network of support that matches their level of need. This can be both formal, such as professional health services, and informal, such as family and friends. The child's needs should be identified and addressed when developing their OOHC case plan. The support that the parents and family will need should be identified and addressed when developing the Family Action Plan for Change (FAP), including what the child and family will need once the child returns home.

For more information see [Case planning in Out-Of-Home-Care – Practice Tips](#) and [Case Planning for Preservation and Restoration – Practice Tips](#).

You can find out more about this in the upcoming Family Finding topic.

## After the Child Returns Home

The time after the child has returned home is one of the most critical periods in a restoration, this is because there is so much change and adjustment for the child, the parents and the family unit. Significant change is happening, and the child and their family will need more support during this time. It is the caseworker's responsibility to:

- Regularly visit the child. Spend time with them along, with siblings and with their parents. The frequency of your visits should increase in the weeks and months immediately following their return home.
- Visit the family at different times of day to understand their experiences, strengths and challenges depending on the different tensions that arise.

- Talk to the child about any changes they would like to see occur in the home and find out how this would improve things for them.
- Communicate with the other people in the child's family network. Coordinate regular case planning meetings including support services for the child, in partnership with the child's parents.
- Ensure that the child can maintain their relationships with other important adults in their life. This could include their previous carers. Talk to parents and children about how this relationship can be maintained.

You may want to organise a Family Group Conference before a child returns home. This will help the family plan for move, the support that will be needed to help keep the child safe and the role each one of them can play.

For more information on supporting a family after a child returns home see [Supporting Parents in Restoration](#) and [Relationship-Based Practice](#).