

## Supporting Parents in Restoration

Caseworkers have an important role in reuniting children with their parent/s, this casework should be in accordance with the Court direction. Casework for the child is guided by the Care Plan, then the OOHC Case Plan. Caseworkers offer guidance, support and encouragement to help parents achieve goals – this work is guided by the Summary of Proposed Plan or Family Action Plan.

For children to return home safely, parents need your support to reach goals in a set timeframe. The timeframes are set so that children are not left waiting for a long period without stability and permanency.

Some parents will be motivated and ready to work with you, but for a multitude of reasons, many will not. Parents might be wary, distrustful, angry or fearful. Working with parents to achieve restoration can be challenging. You might be worried about helping parents overcome the problems and behaviours that made their child unsafe.

It is a caseworker's job to find the best approach to build an open trusting relationship with parents. Be curious about the experience of each parent and work in a way that is child focussed and strengths based.

Permanency Support Program (PSP) Service Providers and Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) need to work collaboratively to support parents during restoration. Each agency plays various roles throughout the restoration process. Understanding each other's role helps make it clear what each agency needs to do to help children return home safely.

For more information see:

- [Foundations of Restoration](#)
- [Restoration Legal Process from Long-Term Care \(PRM-18\)](#)
- [Pathway for Children Entering the Care System](#)

### Parent's Perspective

It is important to treat parents with respect and encourage them to participate in all parts of the restoration process.

Consider that parents may:

- be experiencing grief, pain and shame about having their child removed and being separated
- be experiencing barriers to access safe housing, supports and services because of poverty, disability, transportation, or discrimination
- be afraid that their children may not to be returned to them
- not understand or feel embarrassed that DCJ or a PSP Service Provider is involved with them
- find communication challenging or stressful if they have low literacy or don't share the same culture or language
- have had poor previous experiences with DCJ and may be a care leaver
- be finding it hard to manage painful emotions, alongside a strong desire to change for the sake of their child.
- feel disrespected if caseworkers don't recognise their capacity for change
- be fearful of formal services if they are from a migrant or refugee background and have had traumatic experiences in their country of origin
- feel frustrated if they must work with a new caseworker
- be battling addictions, or mental health issues at the same time.

For more information see [Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration - Practice Tips](#) and [Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration](#).

When planning restoration for Aboriginal children and young people, we must recognise the historical injustices inflicted on Aboriginal people through the forced removal of their children and the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in the child protection system today.

Caseworkers must ensure that they work with Aboriginal families in a dignified, empowering and culturally appropriate way. For guidance see the [Aboriginal Case Management Policy](#) and the working with Aboriginal children, young people and families practice area on our site.

## Talking to Parents and Other Adults About Restoration

When you are planning for a child to be returned to their families, you need to work with child, their parents, the family, kin and other important adults such as carers and community members. Consider what professional services may need to be involved. Remember you may also need a translator to help with communication and/or a cultural consultant.

### Helping Parents Explore Change

- be clear about what needs to change and how this relates to the safety and wellbeing of their child
- seek parent's ideas about what they think needs to change and how it can take place
- recognise that the family are the experts in their own life. Ask them what has and hasn't helped them change in the past
- explore the parent's motivation to change, ask them about their child and hopes for their future. Continually focus them on this motivation.

### Supporting Participation in the Restoration Process – the Family Network

- Discuss with the parents how their extended family can be involved in a family network. Explore the family history and dynamics with parents. Ask who should be included in conversations, explore why they have chosen this.
- Parents may not want some family members involved, or it might not be appropriate because some family members are unsafe.
- If you identify safe people who could be a support in a child's family network but the parents are reluctant to involve them, revisit the conversation, make it child centred, and explain the importance of a network of safe adults in the life of their child.
- Keep in mind the way a person behaves may be a result of anxiety, fear, shock, guilt and shame; don't misinterpret this as hostility or unwillingness to change.

### Working with a family network

- Ask the child, parents and network what hopes and worries they have about restoration.

- Talk about what you see as strengths in the situation; ask for the family network's views. If there is disagreement or conflict across the network, discuss these concerns and problem solve as a group.
- Be clear about what is negotiable and non-negotiable, make sure everyone clearly understands.
- For Aboriginal children and their family offer Aboriginal family-led decision making, this involves community and family in decision making. See the Aboriginal Case Management Policy.
- Ask the family network how you can be most useful in helping them to make changes; what is the best use of other professionals?
- Meet regularly to review progress and celebrate achievements.
- Talk about any changes or new worries and how these relate to the safety and wellbeing of their child.

There are many ways to achieve the same change. Be open to the family's suggestions about what tasks or activities will help them.

For tips on how to develop good working relationships see [Relationship-Based Practice](#).

## Expectations of Parents

During the restoration process parents are required to make significant changes to their previous parenting so that their child will be safe with them. Parents may be grieving for both time lost with their child and the way their lives use to be. They may feel trauma about the experience of their child being removed, some may also be carrying pain and trauma from their own childhoods.

Parents may also be expected to know how to look after their children who have grown and developed while in care. Their children will now have changed and grown, have different developmental needs that may be unfamiliar to their parents and this will take parents and children some time to adapt to.

See [Supporting Children and Young People in Restoration](#)

Take time to build trust with parents and respect that sustaining change is difficult. When setting goals, make sure that they are reasonable and give parents the time they need to achieve them. By identifying a parent's stage of change, you can better understand how you can support and motivate them.

For detailed information on stages of change the see [transtheoretical model of health behavior change](#).

Be mindful of the number of agencies and people working with the parents, they may all be expecting changes in behaviours and actions. This could include DCJ, their child's school, a medical or allied health professionals and drug or alcohol services. Family and friends may also be encouraging parents to make changes. This can be overwhelming for parents, achieving, and sustaining change is hard. It is a caseworkers' role to support parents to manage these different expectations and help them build a network of support people and services.

Some people in a parents' network may undermine their efforts to change. This might include offering drugs or alcohol to parents who are in recovery. Talk to parents about goals and how they can manage relationships which might negatively affect their progress. Some parents may feel it is best to separate from these people to sustain changes.

Understand that making changes may be a lonely process for parents, whose main connections may have been people experiencing similar difficulties. Develop a plan about who and how they can reach out to when feeling lonely or needing support. Where one partner has been violent, it is important not to place expectations on the victim to change or control their partners' use of violence.

For information on family violence and assistance see:

- [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)
- [ntv.org.au](http://ntv.org.au)

## Provide Practical Assistance

Provide practical assistance to the parents at every opportunity. Not only will this be useful to create the changes needed for the child, but it is also a very effective way to build a trusting relationship quickly. For example, clean a house together or arrange for help with housing.

### Assessing Progress Toward Restoration Plans

Parents need to show they are emotionally connected with their child but also that they are willing and able to keep them safe. Be alert for 'misplaced optimism' - overestimating a parent's understanding of and ability to keep their child safe.

Do the parents understand why the child was brought into care? Are they committed to making and sustaining change? Do the parents strengths equal safety for the child? Focus on what you see and hear, and what the child says. There is no 'one size fits all'.

Caseworkers need to be able to assess a parent's:

- behaviours and circumstances that need to change
- progress to achieving these changes
- motivation and ability to make and sustain changes, including the help they need to do this
- capacity to make the changes within a timeframe that suits the child.

Through everyday casework with families, caseworkers assess and make decisions about restoration using professional judgement and evidence-based tools.

Things may change in the parent's circumstances which might make caseworkers worry that restoration is not in the child's best interests. Be open to new information even if it conflicts with the goal that you are working towards.

If you think the child's case plan goal needs to be changed, organise a permanency consultation with your Permanency Coordinator.

DCJ's preferred evidence-based tool is the SDM Restoration Assessment Tool which regularly assesses (every 90 days) progress towards the Family Action Plan for Change including safety and risk and the quality of family time.

For more information see:

- [Formal Restoration Assessments](#)
- [Sharing Risk in Casework](#)
- [s90 Evidence Checklist: Restoration](#)

## Planning for Lapses

Making and sustaining change is difficult. Parents can return to the behaviour that led to their child coming into care. This is a normal part of changing any kind of behaviour. You need to plan for likely ‘lapses’ and have conversations with parents about plans if they do lapse. Be honest about risks to the child returning home.

Restoration can still be in the child’s best interests, even when a parent doesn’t follow the case plan all of the time. Determine whether a set-back can be resolved, or if there is evidence that the parents are not ready to make and sustain the necessary changes even if the casework approach changes.

These moments can provide an important opportunity for learning. What extra support does the parent need? What has triggered the set back and how can that be managed? How can we update the plan for restoration without compromising the child’s safety? Are parts of the case plan not effective or suitable for this family?

For information on involving important people in decision making see [Sharing Risk in Casework](#).

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If you think the child’s permanency case plan goal needs to be changed, you must consult with your Permanency Coordinator and seek approval from DCJ. Where the goal is restoration the approval of the Court may also be required.

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## Planning for Challenges of Returning Home

It is important to note that children and parents often go through a period of repair that can be very bumpy, this may make sustaining changes difficult for parents. Children may feel angry, they may experience some grief at ‘losing their carer’ and they may use behaviours to express these big and mixed emotions.

Parents might have dreams of a perfect reunion, when the reality is likely to be very different. Caseworkers should help prepare parents for this including how the caseworker will help them get support and take breaks.

## After the child returns home

When a child first returns home is one of the most critical times during a restoration. Families need more intensive support during this time. The skills and behaviours they have been developing are put to the test with the everyday reality of how difficult it can often be to care for a child.

PSP caseworkers must:

- Visit the child and their family regularly. Plan to visit at different times of the day to understand how they are coping with different routines. Visits more frequently when a child first returns to live with their parents.
- Spend time with each child alone and also as a family group.
- Listen to the child about what further changes they would like to see and how this would make things better for them.
- Support the parents to maintain the progress they have made to increase the safety and wellbeing of their child.
- Plan for the family's network to provide regular support to the child and family. Be specific and clear about what this will look like and how they can let you know if the family are struggling
- Help work out what role the carer may have during the transition period. Will they have ongoing contact with the child?
- Coordinate any additional support services for the parents, this could include counselling or behaviour management programs.
- Continue to build the parents' strengths, confidence and ability to sustain the changes they have made.
- Explain to parents the different roles of DCJ and PSP caseworkers and why
- Exchange information with DCJ to support DCJ's assessments.
- Making sure the child's safety and needs are being met at home.

When the child returns home DCJ will:

- Carry out a safety assessment and a risk assessment (SARA)



- Undertake a risk-reassessment every 90 days after the initial risk assessment, until restoration is legally achieved.

A child can return to live with their parents while still being under the Parental Responsibility of the Minister. This is called a restoration placement. Restoration is legally achieved when parental responsibility is returned to the child's parents. This can be at the expiration of a Shorter-Term Care Order (STCO) or when the Children's Court rescinds (ends) a court order that previously allocated parental responsibility to the Minister.

See [Relationship-Based Practice](#) for further information.