

Things to Consider if a Child ‘Self-Places’

Children and young people (child) in out-of-home care may decide to leave their carer’s home and return to living with their parents, or someone else that is not an authorised carer (for example a boyfriend or girlfriend). This could be for a long or short time, and for many different reasons. When this occurs, staff in Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and Permanency Support Program (PSP) say the child has “self-placed.”

The period when a child is away from their authorised placement is often an uncertain time for them, their family, their carer and the casework team working with them.

When a child is in parental responsibility of the Minister, it is against the law for the Minister to place them with their parents if it is not a part of a restoration plan approved by the Children’s Court. They are also not allowed to live in an ‘unauthorised placement.’ These measures are in the legislation to help to make sure that children are safe and there are processes in place to make sure they are protected and supported.

Your role is to listen to the views and needs of the child and have conversations with the child’s family and their carer. Carefully consider the reasons why the child self-placed. Help the child safely return to an approved care setting until other plans can be developed. Thoroughly document all attempts you have made to support the child to return to an authorised placement.

The Child’s Voice

A child going to their parents’ home may be the most authentic communication of their ‘voice’. It is an expression of their hopes, views and wishes. Acknowledge the child’s strengths, resilience and resourcefulness in taking action about something they want.

Ask the child why they chose to leave their placement, why they are choosing to be where they are. Use empathy and curiosity to understand their actions and experiences. Use curious questions, for example ‘*When you packed up your bag, what was going on right before that?*’ or ‘*When you think about living with mum, what are*

some of the good things that you think about? What are some of the harder things to think about?

Consider the Reasons for Self-Placement

Casework staff first need to consider the reasons why a child has self-placed. A child's choice to self-place may be affected by a range of factors including:

- their lived experience, both before, during and after entering out-of-home care
- their history of exposure to trauma, abuse and neglect
- feelings of confusion, isolation and loneliness and/or
- their connection to their family, culture and community.

Sometimes a child leaves a carer whom they love and self-places with a parent, because the desire to return home is very strong. This may arise from a family crisis (for example, a death or accident) or family event (for example, a birthday or a wedding). For children with siblings who still live with their parents, consider whether their decision to self-place is related to the child feeling worried about, or wanting to be with, their siblings.

A child may self-place when things are not going well with their carer (for example, if they have had an argument with their carer or another child in the home) and they do not know where else to go. For a young person, consider how their decision to self-place might be related to their transition into adulthood.

A child's actions in self-placing may demonstrate that they do not feel physical or emotional safety in care. This may include situations when a child is experiencing abuse or neglect in care or is experiencing fear or distrust of court decisions. For Aboriginal children, consider whether they are from families or communities that have experienced forced removal of their children under past government policies (referred to as 'the Stolen Generations').

Assess the Circumstances that Led to Self-Placement

Casework staff assess the circumstances that led to self-placement by having conversations with the child that help to understand their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Take the time to understand the child's relationship with the carer. Are there

problems that you can help resolve? What practical support can you give them? Are there other people the child trusts that you can involve?

Because the reasons for self-placement are often complex, casework staff should:

- consult with a casework specialist or senior practitioner (as required) to guide assessment and decision making
- consult with a permanency coordinator where it is necessary to review a child's permanency goal
- seek advice from medical and allied-health specialists (for example a psychologist), if relevant.

Consider the Legal Context

Seek legal advice in relation to your agency's legal obligations and requirements under relevant legislation such as the Care Act (as required).

Whilst upholding your agency's legal obligations, continue to:

- listen to the child, advocate for their best interests, and listen to their thoughts and feelings
- be honest and transparent about the law, the process and any worries you have
- ensure the child is supported to fully participate in all formal meetings about their care arrangements, case plan and legal status.

For more information on hearing a young person's voice in – [Case Planning in Preservation and Restoration – Practice Tips](#).

Support the Child's Return to Safe, Approved Care Arrangements

Your relationship with the child is your best tool in supporting their safety. This requires the child to feel heard, respected and that you care about them. Some things to consider include:

- Continue to listen to and respect the views of the child. It may take days, weeks or longer for the child to fully express why they chose to leave their placement.
- Be patient. The child might be angry, resentful, scared or hurt. Help them to know they can trust you by listening to and acting on their views and wishes wherever you can.

- Be reliable. If you tell the child you will do something, do it.
- Ensure the child is provided with (age-appropriate) opportunities to participate in all decision making.
- Recognise it may take time to heal the relationship between a child and their carer. Don't give up if it doesn't happen right away.
- Develop a plan to help transition the child to safe, approved care arrangements.
- Be open, respectful and consistent with the child, carer and their parents.
- Involve the child, carer, their parents and significant people in their support network to develop the transition plan.
- If the child is to return to their carer, check what extra supports the carer might need to help the child feel safe, happy and loved in their home.

For more information see [Relationship-Based Practice](#)

Respond to the Immediate Safety Needs of the Child

It may take some time to return the child to safe, approved care arrangements. In the interim, speak with the child to explore if they are immediately safe and are having their needs met. For example:

- Determine whether the child needs a phone and credit and knows how to contact you and other safe people. This can be an important safety measure.
- Let them know you will be there for them; whatever they do and say, and wherever they live.
- Ask who other safe people are in their life. Follow up with these people and seek agreement about what, how and when they will check in with the child
- Check whether the child has essential items like toiletries, clothes, food and any medication they need.

Check that the physical environment of the home is safe for the child. Use the home safety inspection checklist to guide you. It is especially important to see where the child will sleep.

Carry out probity checks on the parents and anyone over 16 years old living in the home. This could include:

- Speaking to police about who lives in the home – either over the phone or by formally requesting information through a National Criminal History Check
- Speaking to DCJ about any information they may have on ChildStory that affects the child's safety.



IMMEDIATE SAFETY OF THE CHILD



Ensure you have seen or spoken with the child to confirm they are ok



Ensure the child has a phone and credit, and knows how and who to contact if they feel unsafe



Ensure the child knows you will support them, no matter what



Do they have toiletries / clothes / food / medications?

If the Child is Not Safe or at Risk of Significant Harm

Consult the [Mandatory Reporter Guide](#). If the child is not safe where they are living, immediately report to the Child Protection Helpline.

If you make a report to the Helpline, DCJ will determine whether they need to assess the child's safety and risk. The assessment is the responsibility of DCJ but will be done in collaboration with your agency.

DCJ will also determine if more significant actions are required, for example seeking a warrant or a recovery order to remove the child from the unsafe environment.

During the process, DCJ will inform you of the actions they are taking, consult with you in relation to their assessment and further decision making. Your agency may be asked to assist with parts of the assessment if required.

For more information see the [Permanency Case Management Policy Rules and Practice Guidance](#). Please see other documents in our restoration section for more information.



CHECK IMMEDIATE SAFETY OF THE HOME AND HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS



Probity checks on parents and all household members over 16



Home safety inspection checklist



Where is the child sleeping?

If the Child Self-Places with Parents, is Safe and Wants to Stay

If the child wants to continue living with their parents, have conversations with the child and parent to explain:

- the child needs to live somewhere that is legal and safe while restoration is considered and assessed
- the restoration process includes taking the matter back to the Children's Court.

Consult with your local Permanency Coordinator (PC) to consider whether changing the child's permanency goal to restoration is in their best interests. For more information on this process see [Restoration Legal Process from Long-Term Care \(PRM-18\)](#)

Continue Case Planning and Case Work

Whether a child has self-placed with their parent's home or are living with someone else, the PSP service provider continues to exercise primary case responsibility.

Consider how will you support the child to continue to reach their case plan goals

whilst remaining safe. For example:

- How will you help the child continue (or restart) their education? Do they need to change schools? Is there a specialist education program that might suit them better than school? Who will help the child get to school?
- How will you support the child to keep the relationships with the important people in their lives?
- Who will ensure the child maintains health appointments and activities?
- Consider asking your PC or your local CFDU for group supervision or a permanency consultation to plan for next steps.



DCJ REPORTING AND CONTRACTING REQUIREMENTS



ROSH



Notify DCJ CFDU



Complete away from
placement forms



Consult with a
permanency
coordinator

Refer to the PSP [Away from Placement Policy](#) for more detail on what is required when a child has self-placed. Submit to DCJ a *Notification and request for continuation of PSP packages form*, within 24 hours of the child self-placing. This lets DCJ know they are not in their authorised placement and enables the continuation of funding.

Follow your PSP Service Providers Own Policies and Procedures

Make sure you understand and follow your agency's own policies and procedures.

- Do you need to conduct a risk assessment?
- Do you need to notify nominated senior staff?
- Do you need to complete a safety plan?
- Do you need to complete a plan that will help the child return to their carer?
- Continue to provide support to carers and other significant people in the young person's life.
- Thoroughly document all attempts you have made to support the young person to return to an authorised placement.



YOUR ORGANISATIONS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



Risk assessment



Reporting matrix



Safety plan



Continue to provide support to carers and other significant people in the children's life



Return to placement plan



Thoroughly document all attempts to have the child or young person return to an authorised placement