



CHALLENGE
Community Services

Foster Care

Foster Care Handbook

We'll be with you all the way!





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N.B. the information provided in this booklet is valid until 31/06/2018. Challenge reserves the right to have this information updated at any time.



Geographical coverage and contacts

General Foster Care Enquiries 1800 084 954

Albury (02) 6064 1000

Armidale (02) 6159 4000

Campbelltown (02) 4621 8500

Dubbo (02) 5804 6650

Maitland (02) 4015 7300

Rosehill (02) 9898 2500

Tamworth (02) 6760 0700

Taree (02) 4858 0900

Tuggerah (02) 4305 4200

Wickham (02) 4037 2330



Out-of-home care (OOHC) placement type

- General Foster Care
- General Foster Care + 2
- Intensive Foster Care
- Residential Services

What do children and young people need from carers?

Children who are separated from their families may include:

- Infants who have special feeding and medical needs
- Brothers and sisters who should stay together
- Newborns withdrawing from drugs who need to be nurtured
- Children and young people with developmental or physical disabilities
- Children with emotional problems
- Children with complex medical and health issues
- Children who need families that are sensitive to and respectful of their culture and their birth family
- Teenagers who have not experienced a positive family life and now need extra patience and commitment

All foster children are affected by the separation from their family and show signs of stress, worry and insecurity. Their anxiety and fears are often expressed in the form of difficult behaviours, such as tantrums, withdrawal and running away. Some children have never learnt to live within the usual routines of family life and will need extra amounts of love, understanding and patience.



Types of foster care

Respite care

This involves care provided for regular short stays e.g. one weekend per fortnight or per month. Respite gives carers a break and provides a positive experience for the child. Respite foster carers are asked to make a commitment of twelve months, to provide stability for the child or young person.

Temporary or short term care

Temporary care is limited in time, usually overnight to three months maximum. At the end of temporary care, the child may return to their family or be placed in long-term care.

Temporary care may be needed because of:

- An emergency e.g. illness or other family crisis
- Intervention by NSW Department of Family and Community Services (CS), where a child is removed from their parents to ensure their safety and wellbeing

Long term care

This type of care is for children who cannot live with their families and need a family to grow up in until their family circumstances change or they turn eighteen.

Crisis care

Short notice care will need to commence immediately. The stay could be a few days or up to three months.

What is the criterion for being a foster carer?

You must be able to:

- Make a commitment to being a meaningful person in a child's life
- Provide a safe, loving and caring environment to a child
- Respect children and their primary attachment to their families
- Demonstrate that you are a creative problem solver, have listening skills, flexibility and a sense of humour
- Manage your family finances with the addition of another child and the organisation's reimbursement for the type of care you provide
- Participate in meetings, networks and training that involve your carer role
- Work as part of a larger team

Specifically you will be asked to:

- Make a 'Prohibited Employment Declaration' that you have not been convicted of a serious sex offence, which prohibits you from applying to be a foster carer
- Consent to allow screening of your criminal and work record in relation to sexual misconduct and acts of violence involving children (Working with Children Check)
- Agree to Challenge seeking information from CS to ensure no previous involvement
- You will need to provide a 100-point identification check e.g. Passport, Driver's License, Medicare Card, etc. You will be informed of your carer status at the completion of the assessment in writing. Should your application be unsuccessful, a Challenge Foster Care representative will be happy to speak with you and outline the reason(s) why

Carer Information

Are there age restrictions on carers?

Each carer will be assessed on a case by case basis. It is expected that carers providing long term care will be able to do so until a child can live independently.

Records for carers to keep

Carers will need to keep a diary, which Challenge will provide. Foster carers will also need to keep a record of the foster child's life.

Do you accept carers with a disability?

Challenge supports the placement of children with carers with a disability. This is assessed case by case.

What is your philosophy regarding same sex couples?

Challenge supports the placement of children with same sex couples.



What is your policy regarding carers working full time/part time?

For Intensive Support Foster Care, Challenge recommends that the primary carer is home-based for the foster children. For General Foster Care there is additional flexibility depending on needs.

Fertility (where infertility is an issue)

To be eligible to provide long term care, an applicant must have finished their involvement with a fertility program for a period of not less than twelve (12) months.

Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of their infertility and an understanding of the impact of infertility upon each of them as an individual and as a family.

Health

An applicant's health (both physical and mental) shall be such as to ensure he or she is able to undertake the task of fostering. For applicants for long-term care, this may involve raising the child to adulthood.

Religious and cultural beliefs

Foster Carers will be required to support the cultural and religious belief of the young person.

Couples

Couples must demonstrate that they are in a stable relationship.

Accommodation

Applicants should have adequate, safe accommodation for a child. This does not mean that applicants should necessarily own their own home. A bedroom must be available for a foster child, though this can be shared with other children when appropriate.

Caring skills

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to undertake the special responsibilities involved in caring for a foster child. Carers must be able to:

- Demonstrate attitudes and connections consistent with being a good carer
- Demonstrate personal resilience
- Demonstrate personal teamwork
- Provide child focused care; and
- Provide a safe environment that is free from abuse.

Birth family contact

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origins, culture and past experience of the child or young person in their care. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of the agency's commitment to ongoing contact between the child and his/her birth parents and a willingness to facilitate such contact.



Behaviour management of children or young people

Carers are expected to work closely with agency staff in developing appropriate behaviour management strategies for children and young people in their care. Foster carers are not allowed to use any physical force to discipline foster children. Carers are expected to work closely with agency staff in developing appropriate behaviour management strategies for the particular child or young person in their care. Applicants must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical punishments e.g. hitting. It is very important that foster children are disciplined in a way that sends a strong message to them that they are cared for in spite of their behaviour. Experience has shown that hitting or other physical punishment is not effective in dealing with these children. Our agency has a behaviour management policy which guides carers on how they can appropriately discipline children.

Use of psychotropic medication

The use of psychotropic medication to manage, control or change the behaviour of a child or young person may be required. When it is part of a planned response to an identified challenging behaviour, it must be documented as part of the behaviour support/management plan.

The administration of psychotropic medication to a child or young person in out-of-home care, for the purpose of controlling their behaviour, must form part of a comprehensive strategy described in the behaviour support/management plan.

All psychotropic medication must be kept in Webster packs and carers are responsible for ensuring all medication is stored in a safe place where children cannot access it.

Health and hygiene standards

Carers are expected to conform to guidelines designed to ensure that children are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include practicing of universal infection control and ensuring that there is **no smoking** within the home.

Applications to other agencies

Applicants must advise of previous applications to become a carer with other agencies in Australia and overseas and the outcomes of those applications. Applicants will be asked for permission for this agency to contact others to whom you have previously applied.



What is the process of becoming a foster carer?

Becoming a carer involves a number of steps. You have taken the first step in making your enquiry. If you have called us, we have registered your enquiry. We would like you to please read this pack carefully. If you are still interested in applying to be a carer, send us the Registration of Interest form found online or at the end of this booklet. When you do that we will arrange an initial Information Exchange Session.

The Information Exchange Session gives you and the people in your household an opportunity to meet our team and ask any preliminary questions.

After this session, you can decide whether you wish to continue the process of becoming a carer by participating in a 2 day training program called Shared Stories, Shared Lives and a series of assessment interviews. The assessment interviews are not something you pass or fail. We work with you to discover together whether fostering is a suitable option for you at this time.

Once you have been approved as a carer, you will be approached when a child or young person is matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised for you and your household if you accept the placement of that child or young person. Sometimes it is possible for you to meet the child or young person before you make the decision to accept the placement.



Assessment Process – Only for carers transitioning from community services

Is a re-assessment required?

Yes. It may not be a full assessment but a partial assessment. This will be required to maintain our Accreditation.

How long does a re-assessment take?

A re-assessment may take 4 – 8 weeks, usually involving face to face interviews; the amount of time will depend on the information provided by CS.

What do you need to see in the re-assessment process e.g. children, secondary carer?

This depends on household. Assessments include all adult members of the household and other family member's party to the fostering (e.g. Children in the home).

Does the re-assessment process guarantee my authorisation will remain the same as it was under CS?

As carers circumstances change over time we cannot guarantee that your authorisation will remain exactly the same. Challenge will work with all carers to ensure that their authorisation is as close to possible to their authorisation under CS.

Can my authorisation be changed e.g. short term to long term carer?

Yes, but further assessment will need to occur to ensure program requirements are met.

Is re-training required?

Applicants must be willing to participate in the training and assessment process. Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to work with Challenge Foster Care in order to meet the changing needs of a child or young person. This will involve a willingness and ability to communicate with the agency and participate in planning and reviewing of the child's care and their work with the Agency. Whilst not compulsory, carers are strongly encouraged to obtain their first aid certificate if they do not have one already.

Are there ongoing training requirements and are they compulsory?

Ongoing training and development is strongly encouraged for all carers. Training opportunities may be offered through specialist training services. Carer training is recorded on the carer's file, but attendance at specific training is not compulsory. Carers are required to complete first aid training.



What are the policies or agreements that I will be required to sign?

A carer's placement agreement covers:

- The role, responsibility, expectations and rights of the Carer
- Decision making authority
- Schedule 2 Code of Conduct for Authorised Carers and Sections: 29, 30, 144, 158 of the Act
- Charter of Rights for Children in Out of Home Care

How often do you conduct probity checks?

Challenge will be conducting Working with Children and National Criminal History Checks on all transferring carers. Should a carer be convicted of a subsequent offence they are required to inform Challenge.

What is your policy regarding adoption?

Challenge supports carers seeking to adopt if this is in the best interest of the child or young person.

What if I change my mind during the assessment process?

As a carer you can lodge a withdrawal application to Challenge, stating reasons you wish to withdraw and this will be signed off by both Challenge and the carer.

Can I continue to use my chosen support agency e.g. AbSec, Australian Childcare Alliance NSW, Connecting Carers?

Yes.



Children in care

Are separate bedrooms needed for each child in my home?

This will depend on the child or young person's needs when being placed. For example a child with special needs may require a separate bedroom. It will need to be determined on a case by case basis.

Respite care

It is possible that foster carers may be able to choose their own respite carer for children in their care; each individual situation will be taken into consideration.

Matching

Once you have been authorised as a carer, you will be approached when a child or young person is matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised for you and your family if you accept the placement of that child or young person. Sometimes it is possible for you to meet the child or young person before you make the decision about taking the child(ren) into care.

Are there limits on the number of children I can care for?

The number of children Challenge will place with a carer is assessed on a case by case basis. For example a child with special needs will involve a much higher level of care. If you would like to increase the number of children you have in your care, a reassessment will occur to determine your capacity to meet the needs of any additional child whilst not compromising the quality of care being received by the children already in placement with you.

Will I be expected to facilitate contact?

Birth family contact occurs according to the child or young person's case plan. It is the role of the caseworker to arrange venue and transport, and to supervise the contact visit. Where it is possible carers can assist with transport. Contact visits between siblings in care are often unsupervised, and are usually arranged with carers attending and providing transport.

What respite opportunities are available?

Challenge will need to recruit respite carers. Future intentions are that respite is provided, when the needs of the child and carer indicates this is necessary.

Is respite compulsory?

No however, Challenge does encourage carers in Intensive Foster Care to take regular respite breaks.

Will I continue to receive an allowance when my child is in respite?

Carer payments usually continue unchanged for weekend respite however, this is determined on a case-by-case basis.



Who investigates allegations and what supports are available to me?

Challenge investigates any reportable conduct matters and will refer to independent professional bodies if required. In some cases Challenge may use an accredited third party.

Debriefing is offered along with clinical support and additional external counselling is available for all carers on an individual basis.

Will I be included in the decision making process for issues related to children I care for and my family?

Carers participate in case reviews and other meetings to coordinate services and case plans for the child in their care. Caseworkers may liaise on a carer's behalf with other services so that the child has access to the services they need.

What supports can you offer if my child comes from a CALD background?

Children, who require a cultural support plan, will have their Case Worker consult other key stakeholders to develop the plan that meets the child or young person's cultural needs.

What supports can you offer if my child comes from an Aboriginal background?

Aboriginal children have a cultural support plan developed by their Case Worker, in consultation with birth family, kin and community members. Resources are made available to carers (including training) to promote positive and meaningful connections to Aboriginal culture for the child or young person. However, priority is that Aboriginal children will be supported by an Aboriginal organisation and placed with Aboriginal carers.



Minimum Care Requirements

How often will we be asked to meet with agency staff?

Challenge carers work in partnership with case workers, communicating regularly about a child or young person's ongoing needs and any concerns. This is a flexible arrangement that meets the needs of the child or young person. Carers are involved in reviews and are invited to attend annual case conferences. Caseworkers will visit children/young people in the home on a regular basis.

What kind of support can I expect from your agency?

- 24/7 support (out of hours support provided for critical incidents and emergencies)
- Allocated case worker for each child/sibling group
- The same case worker will provide support to the foster carers of that child
- Case workers provide regular home visits, phone calls and emails and access to after-hours support
- Initial and ongoing carer training is provided
- A carer debrief is done at the end of placements
- Support liaising with other services and professionals e.g. schools, medical practitioners, counselors etc
- Carer support groups, social activities (e.g. Foster care week)
- Facilitation, supervisions and support for a child's contact with their birth family and significant others

Complaints Resolution

If I disagree with a decision what is the process of appeal?

Challenge Foster Care have a complaints procedure which will be given to you at the time of your authorisation. Challenge also has an online complaints procedure process which all carers can access.

What is your complaints policy and procedure? Is there an independent body?

Carers are provided with the policy and procedure when they are authorised by the agency. Carers also have access to the NSW Ombudsman to lodge a complaint.

Can I choose my own support person?

Yes.

What if I move to another area and your agency does not cover this area?

Challenge will assist in supporting a move. Where the move includes a child in care, the agency will support and facilitate case management transfer of the child or young person if it is seen to be in the best interests and supported by CS.



Allowances

Allowances

- General Foster Care - \$307.86 per week
- General Foster Care + 2 - \$487.48 per week
- Intensive Foster Care - \$769.65 per week

Respite allowances

- General Foster Care - \$82.10 per night
- General Foster Care + 2 - \$102.62 per night
- Intensive Foster Care - \$153.93 per night

What am I expected to pay for as a carer?

Foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance to meet the day to day expenses in caring for a child or young person.

For example expenses such as:

- General clothing
- Footwear
- Basic medical needs
- Toiletries
- Recreational activities
- School camps
- Sporting activities
- Education costs
- Uniforms
- Textbooks
- School excursions
- General medical needs and dental needs
- Pre-school fees
- Food



Financial resources

In general, applicants who provide long-term care should have adequate financial resources to allow for one full-time parent to be at home after placement to allow the development of a relationship between carer and child.

Applicants for temporary care may be employed full or part-time if they are able to provide adequate time to the child or young person in their care. For example, it may be possible to work part-time and still care for a school aged child, but this may not be possible if the child has particular needs, or is very young. A foster care allowance is paid to carers to cover most of the additional costs of caring for a foster child.

