

Reunification Training



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care



Content

1. Defining reunification
2. A bit of history
3. Exploring parenting
4. Assessing reunification
5. Planning reunification
6. Building resilience
7. If you have concerns
8. Grief and loss



Reunification is the ultimate goal for most children and young people in family based care.

A successful reunification will see children return to their family of origin in a home environment that has been assessed as being no longer harmful.

Principles of Reunification

The [Child Protection Act 1999](#) outlines the following principles that relate to reunification of a child or young person with their family:

- ▶ A child's family is the preferred permanency option wherever possible.
- ▶ Most families can care for their children if assisted.
- ▶ Reunification requires collaborative case planning by the department working with the child, family members and other persons, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services, independent entities, approved carers, and other government and non-government agencies.

When reunification is not possible, stable long-term placement options for the child needs to be identified in a timeframe that considers the child's age and needs.

Continued...

5B (f) Child Protection Act 1999 states:

If a child is removed from the child's family, support should be given to the child and the child's family for the purpose of allowing the child to return to the child's family if the return is in the child's best interests.

Activity

Speak to the person next to you about what this means in practice.



A bit of history...

- ▶ At the end of the 2004 - 2005 year, there were a total of 5750 children and young people in Alternate Care.
- ▶ Significant changes occurred in the Child Protection system throughout 2005-2006 as a result of the implementation of the 110 recommendations from the CMC in 2004.
- ▶ As of March 2025, 13568 children and young people were in Alternate Care

Carmody

- ▶ A major focus of the Honourable Tim Carmody's inquiry into the Child Protection System in 2013 was the amount of children and young people now in Alternate Care and a concern that Queensland was becoming over reliant on the Tertiary System of Child Protection without putting the necessary resources into Early and Secondary intervention.

Continued...

- ▶ Carmody's final report and recommendations reflected this concern. Many recommendations focused on the need for services to assist families to care for their children and a need to work intensively with families when children are placed into care, to ensure that parents have very real opportunities to achieve case plan goals in order to have their children safely returned to their care.

Legislative Reform 2018

Significant Legislative reform was introduced into the Child Protection Act 1999 in October 2018 as a result of Carmody's recommendations including:

- The introduction of 'Principles for achieving permanency for a child';
- Additional principles for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children;
- Introduction of mandatory concurrent planning;
- A limit to how long Short Term Custody orders can be granted.

These will be explored during the course of this training.



Scenarios

A number of scenarios will be circulated for you to read.

In groups of three, read the scenarios and discuss whether the circumstances reflected in the scenario would warrant the child/ren coming into care.



Activity

- ▶ Individually develop two columns; one that reads Poor Parenting and the other that reads Harmful Parenting.
- ▶ Write some examples under each.



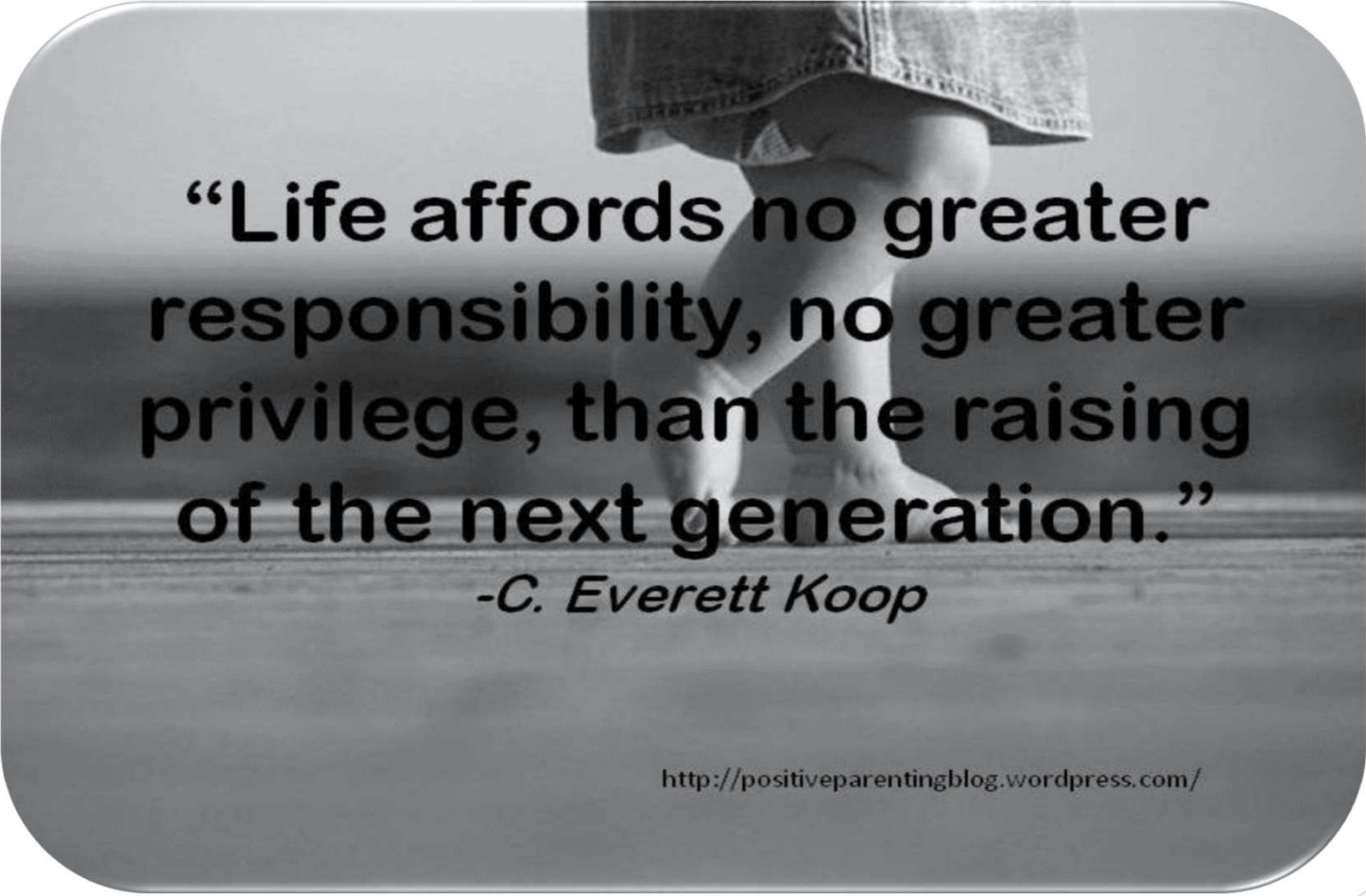
Poor Parenting vs Harmful Parenting

Poor Parenting

- Child not provided with balanced diet.
- Child late to school every day impacting on child's education.
- Parents yell at children calling them stupid, useless and dumb.
- Children often wearing clothes that are often ill fitting, not clean and not weather appropriate.

Harmful parenting

- Child not provided with meals on a regular basis.
- Child does not attend school on a regular basis in order to stay home and look after younger siblings due to parents substance use.
- Child left home alone most weekends whilst parents are out partying.
- Parents use physical discipline resulting in visible injuries.



“Life affords no greater responsibility, no greater privilege, than the raising of the next generation.”

-C. Everett Koop

<http://positiveparentingblog.wordpress.com/>



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care

Defining difference

Parenting is a very emotionally charged topic - everyone enters into parenting having their own background and set values, beliefs, morals and ethics. This then sets the scene for the type of parent they will be.

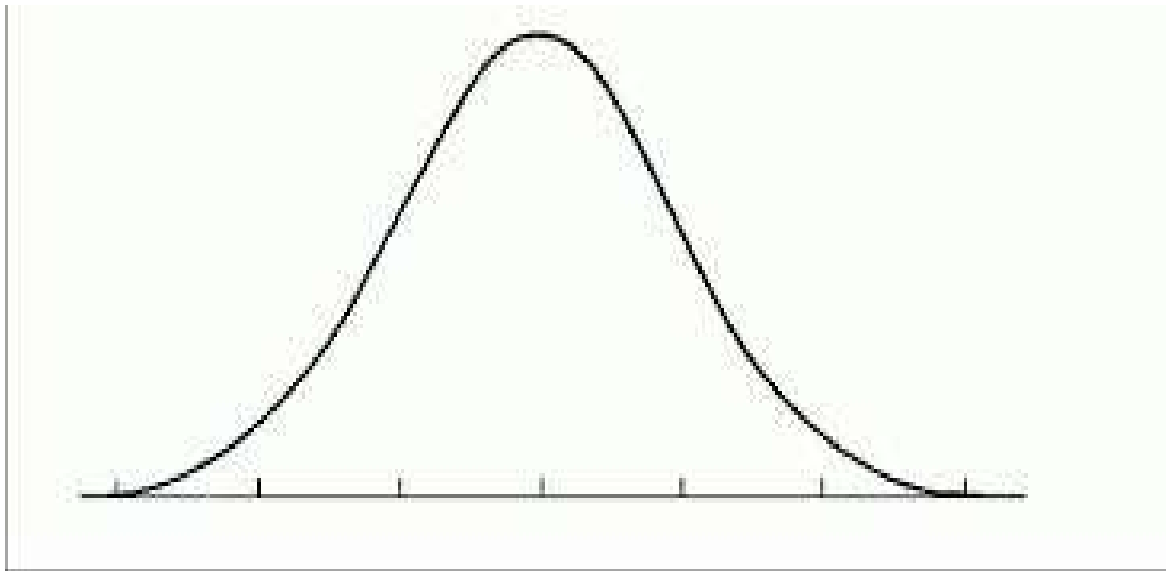
As a society we are constantly judging; it is almost human nature to compare each other, especially when it comes to parenting. However, we need to understand as people working within Child Protection, in whatever capacity, the difference between poor parenting and harmful parenting.

Government intervention

The Law states, that Child Safety can only intervene and remove children and young people from their family when the parenting is resulting in 'significant harm' to child/ren.

This can be very confusing for carers when the care expected of them is so high - however as hard as it is to accept at times, children will be reunified to environments that carers feel are less than ideal.

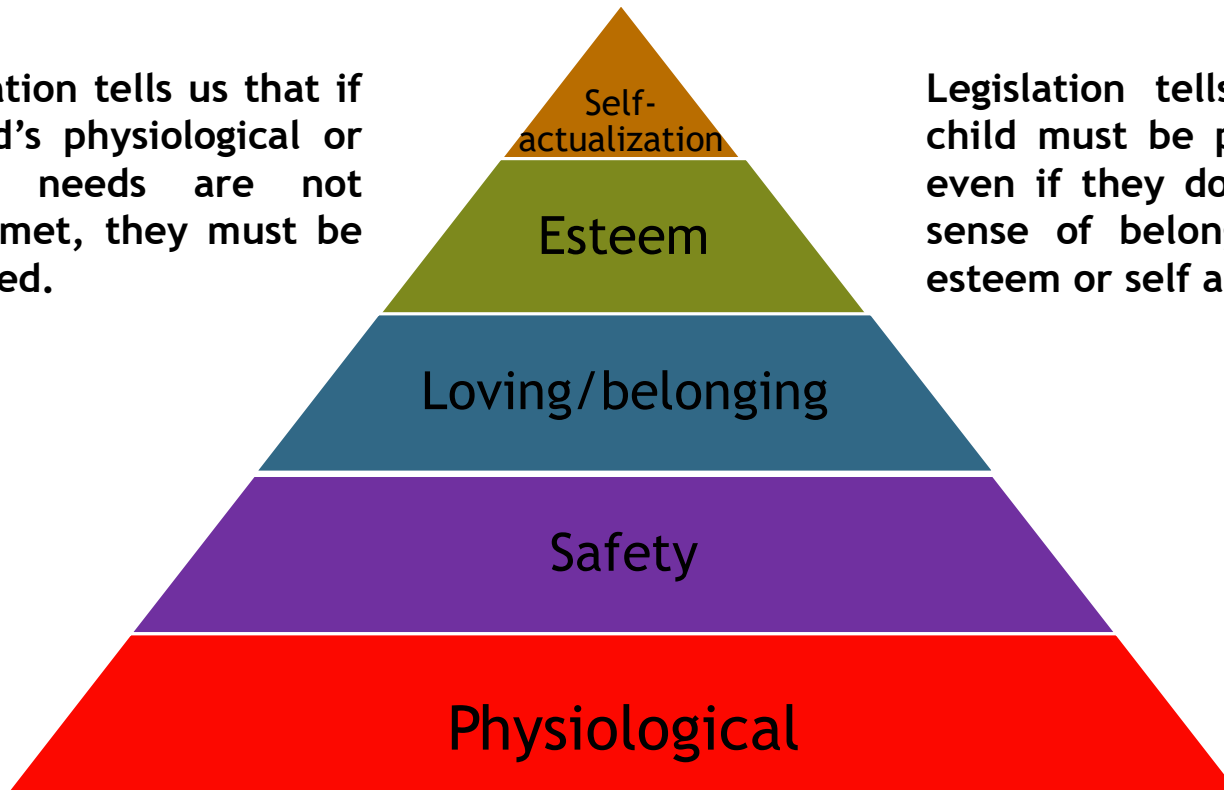
Difference in care expected



Most parents parent in the middle - carers are expected to parent at a higher standard in line with the Statement of Standards and to accept when children are placed back to not even average parenting but in a lot of cases safe enough parenting.

Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

Legislation tells us that if a child's physiological or safety needs are not being met, they must be removed.



Legislation tells us that a child must be placed back, even if they do not have a sense of belonging / love, esteem or self actualization

How do Child Safety assess reunification is safe

- Requirements for assessment for safe reunification are set out in Child Safety Legislation, Policy and Procedures.

Let's brain storm what some of Child Safety's considerations are when assessing Reunification.



Considerations for reunification

- ▶ Compliance with Case Plan
- ▶ Risk of future harm
- ▶ Children-Parent contact quality
- ▶ Children's views
- ▶ Stakeholder views
- ▶ Parent's ongoing willingness to engage with intervention services

Children's Court

- ▶ It must be recognised that if Child Safety do not believe Reunification is in the best interests of a child or young person, they need to demonstrate why to the Children's Court.
- ▶ In doing this, they need to evidence that if the child is returned, they will be at risk of significant harm - this is not about evidencing poor parenting, Child Safety must evidence harmful parenting.

Legislative Reform

Impacts on Reunification

Duration of Short term orders

Section 62

This section outlines the duration of child protection orders

- ▶ Total amount of short term orders can not exceed a period of two years
- ▶ Takes effect from time of final order, not interim
- ▶ Subsequent short term orders can be applied for and made under exceptional circumstances

Concurrent Planning

► Amendment to 51 (B) Case Planning

If the primary goal is to reunify the child to the parent or parents, an alternative goal must be in place in the event that the timely reunification of the child to the care of the parent is not possible.

Concurrent planning

- two simultaneous plans

- ▶ Permanent Reunification is always the primary goal
- ▶ Alternative Permanent Case Plan goal

Primary permanency goal

- Action steps
- Who will do what, by when?

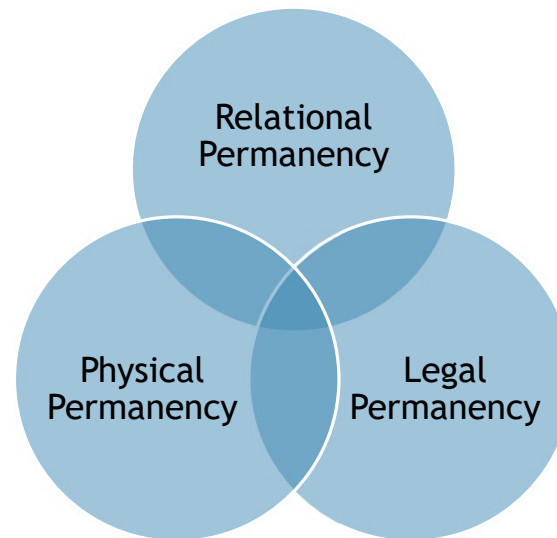
Alternative permanency goal

- Action steps
- Who will do what, by when?

Permanency Options

Reunification ↔ Long Term Alternative Care ↔ Adoption

- ▶ Safety, wellbeing, and best interests of the child for LIFE
- ▶ Permanency enables children:
 - ▶ Sense of belonging and security
 - ▶ Develop good coping skills and resilience
 - ▶ Emotional and Cognitive development
 - ▶ Future and Educational Outcomes
 - ▶ Trust
 - ▶ Secure base
 - ▶ Secure and positive identity
 - ▶ Cultural identity formation



Additional principles for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children

Section 5C

- (1) The following additional principles apply for administering the Act in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Islander children:
- (a) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to **Self-determination**.
 - (b) The long-term effect of a decision on the child's identity and connection with the child's family and community must be taken into account.

Section 5C

(2) The following principles (the child placement principles) also apply in relation to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children

The five core elements:

(a) **PREVENTION:**

Protecting children's rights to grow up in family, community and culture by supporting families to care safely for their children.

(b) **PARTNERSHIP:**

Ensuring the participation of community representatives in service design, delivery and individual case decisions.

(c) **PLACEMENT:**

Placing children in out-of-home care in accordance with the established ATSICPP placement hierarchy.

(d) **PARTICIPATION:**

Ensuring the participation of children, parents and family members in decisions regarding the safety, belonging and wellbeing of their children.

(e) **CONNECTION:**

Maintaining and supporting connection to family, community, culture and country for children in family based care.



What makes a good reunification

In groups of four, and using the butchers paper provided, record what you believe contributes to a good reunification process from a Carer's perspective, Child's perspective, Child Safety perspective and Parent's perspective.



Child's Perspective

- ▶ Child's concerns and worries are genuinely listened to and proactive steps are taken to address these.
- ▶ They are not feeling divided loyalties but rather have permission to feel love for their placement family and family of origin.
- ▶ Reunification is paced at a level that meets the child's needs.

Carers Perspective

- ▶ Carers concerns are heard and responded to appropriately.
- ▶ Carers are part of the planning process and involved in communications with parents, if appropriate.
- ▶ Carers are consulted in respect to changes to reunification plans, i.e. increased contact.

The words of a carer...

I consider it a privilege to have been in relationships with the parents of children in our care; I say privilege because knowing these parents has changed my worldview.

I have become more compassionate, less judgemental, more inclusive to understanding the world these parents live in; it is often so alone, so dark, so condemning, that giving up does seem to be the only option.

I began to understand that a parent's absence from a visit doesn't necessarily mean they don't care, but just maybe their sense of loss after losing their child leaves them emotionally and mentally barren.

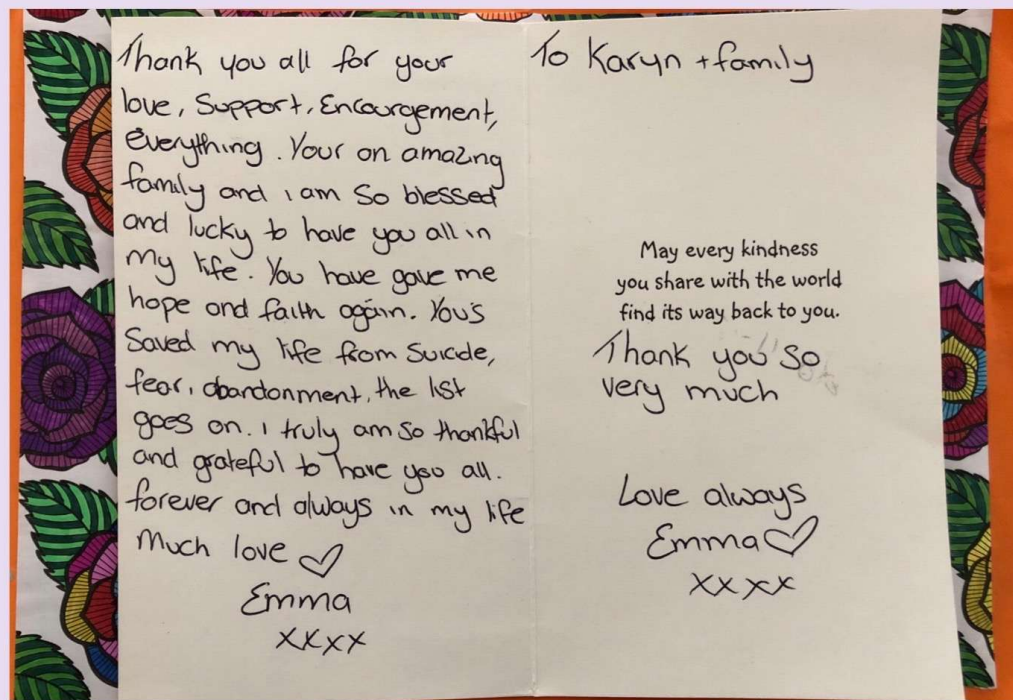
- Develop empathy; where possible carers should have an understanding of the family history
- A caring smile, and welcoming body language
- Be available and willing to become involved with the child's family
- Foster Care profile can be shared with the family, including child's room
- Letter writing by the carers to the parents talking about the child's life
- Carers being involved with family time and supporting parents during visits with their children
- Helping children write letters home, arranging sibling contact
- Start Life Story boxes, photo books, Mother's/Father's Day gift giving

Child Safety Perspective

- ▶ Child Safety professionals are trusted to make informed professional decisions in respect to safe reunifications.
- ▶ Child Safety are provided relevant information and feedback from both carers and children in respect to contact experiences.

Parent's Perspective

- ▶ Parents would like to meet with the people caring for their children - they may not be ready to do this immediately after their children come into care, but the opportunity to meet should not be time limited.
- ▶ Parents don't need judgement, they need understanding. Do not assume, rather form relationships that allow you as carers to have insight into a parents journey.
- ▶ Reunifications work best when parents and carers have formed a relationship, parents benefit from carer mentoring and having someone believe in their ability to make the necessary changes to have their children placed back with them.
- ▶ Acknowledge parents in their role, consult with them, ask them for advice and celebrate key milestones.



What do children want...

- ▶ Children and young people tell us that continued contact with their families impacts positively on how they see themselves.
- ▶ Children and young people want their parents to reach case plan goals - they worry about them and the majority of children and young people have unconditional love for their parents.

Dana says; 'For my mum, she was a single mum, I think being made to go and see a psychologist would have really really helped her. And me. If it had been free that would have been good because she didn't have any money. Also some sort of respite - as she was a single mum and I think that was part of our problem. Also parenting classes, she didn't have many friends or anyone she was close to at all so she had no one to learn how to be a parent off. So if she had met other parents then she could have had some role models to learn off.'

... mum was really isolated and didn't have any friends or talk to anyone and get any help. It would have been great if she had. Both for me and for her. I still worry about her now and I call her every week to see if she is still alive basically.'

(Create, submission to NSW Child Protection Legalisation reform March 2013)

Content

Jarred 18 states; 'In my mum's situation it took her quite a few years to get into the right state of mind.' It depends on the situation - on what the parent's problems are. Like with the example of drug problems, it takes a while to get off them and to deal with that and then learn how to look after your kids and do a good job and keep them safe.

(Create, submission to NSW Legislation reform March 2013)

Building resilience in children and young people

The Oxford dictionary defines Resilience as: *the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.*

Grotberg, H states:

With resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs. The crisis children face both within their families and in their communities can overwhelm them.

(Grotberg, H; A guide to promoting resilience in children, strengthening the human spirit)

Continued...

Reunification will be the primary goal for most placements - Help children and young people identify safe people in their life - can include teachers, friends, aunts (Safety and support network).

I HAVE

- ▶ People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what;
- ▶ People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble;
- ▶ People who show me how to do things right by the way they do things;
- ▶ People who want me to learn to do things on my own;
- ▶ People who help me when I am sick, in danger or need to learn.

(Grotberg, H; A guide to promoting resilience in children, strengthening the human spirit)

**Every child needs at least
one adult who is irrationally
crazy about him or her.**

Urie Bronfenbrenner



**Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care**

Continued...

Help a child or young person know ...

I CAN

- ▶ Talk to others about things that frighten me or bother me.
- ▶ Find ways to solve problems that I face.
- ▶ Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous.
- ▶ Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or to take action.
- ▶ Find someone to help me when I need it.

CO-REGULATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



Label

Teach the use of words to express emotions.



Model

Show waiting and self-calming strategies.



Redirect

Divert child attention to regulate behavior.



Support

Provide a warm, nurturing, supportive relationship.



Positive

Use positive reinforcements when rules are followed.



Clear

Set and maintain clear expectations and limits.

WWW.THESPEECHPRACTICE.COM

Continued...

Reinforce for a child or young person

I AM

- ▶ A person people can like and love.
- ▶ Glad to do nice things for others and show my concern.
- ▶ Respectful of myself and others.
- ▶ Willing to be responsible for what I do.
- ▶ Sure things will be all right.

HOW TO Build Your Child's Self- Esteem

By the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) Program



Use praise

that is specific,
sincere & based
on efforts (vs
outcomes)



Let your child
make her
**own
decisions**
when possible



Let your child
take
**reasonable
risks**
to build self-
confidence



teach your child
**positive self-
talk**



help your child to
**learn from
mistakes**
and problem solve



give your child
responsibilities
to show him what
he can do



let your child
**take pride in
accomplishments**



be a positive
self-esteem
role model



with positive self
esteem your child
will have more ...

confidence

**willingness to try
new things**

**perseverance in the
face of challenges**



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care



Continued...

A resilient child does not need all of these features to be resilient, but one is not enough. A child may be loved (I HAVE), but if he or she has no inner strength (I AM) or social, interpersonal skills (I CAN), there can be no resilience.

A child may have a great deal of self-esteem (I AM), but if he or she does not know how to communicate with others or solve problems (I CAN), and has no one to help him or her (I HAVE), the child is not resilient.

A child may be very verbal and speak well (I CAN), but if he or she has no empathy (I AM) or does not learn from role models (I HAVE), there is no resilience. Resilience results from a combination of these features.

(Grotberg, H; A guide to promoting resilience in children, strengthening the human spirit)

Activity

A sheet of three scenarios will be distributed.
You will be placed into groups to discuss one of the scenarios.
Apply the I HAVE, I CAN and I AM strategies to assist you to deal with the identified issues.





What does research tell us?

Research out of America and taken from all 52 States evidenced consistent factors that point to effective reunification, these being:

- The use of some type of family team meetings (i.e. FGM in Australia) to facilitate reunification efforts;
- Foster parents support of contact;
- Foster parents direct support of birth parents (e.g. mentoring).

Continued...

Research also tells us that 22% of Young People will go back home to live after exiting care (CREATE Report Card, 2009).

For this reason, we must build resilience in our children and young people so they have the skills to manage the complexities of their adult relationships with natural family.

Continued...

- ▶ Increasing the frequency of visits leading up to reunification (helps to facilitate achievement of goals and decreases re-entries to foster care).
- ▶ Early and diligent searches for extended family members and the use of kinship care supports maintaining parent-child connections during out of home care episodes and contribute to reunification efforts.

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/family_reunification

What if your concerns are not listened to?

Remembering the difference between poor parenting and harmful parenting.

If you believe that during a reunification process a child in your care is being harmed or is at unacceptable risk of significant harm - what are your options when you feel your concerns are not being heard by CSO - talk to the person next to you.

Options to be heard - Internal

- ▶ Always attempt to address matter at local level, CSO, Team Leader and then CSSC Manager.
- ▶ Regional Complaints Office.
- ▶ Central Complaints Unit.
- ▶ Minister's office.

You should always go through the above processes sequentially.

Office of the Public Guardian (OPG)

- ▶ The 'OPG' replaced a number of functions that were held by the old Commission for Children and Young People and Guardian and was a recommendation of Carmody.
- ▶ Although holding onto some similar functions as the Commission - the powers and capabilities of the OPG have been extended.
- ▶ The OPG provides an external avenue of complaint for carers, children and young people.

Continued...

- ▶ Community Visitor (CV) program - visitable sights ensure only the most vulnerable children are being visited.
- ▶ Anyone can request a CV visit a child or young person that is not being visited, this can include a carer or the child/young person themselves.
- ▶ CV's continue to monitor the Standards of Care being provided to a child both from Child Safety and the carer.

Continued...

- ▶ Child Advocate role ensures that all children and young people have opportunity to be represented in Children's Court and QCAT matters.
- ▶ The OPG has ability to access all and any information Child Safety hold on file in respect to a child.
- ▶ The OPG has ability to take matters to QCAT on behalf of children when they feel that a child or young person's standards of care are not being met or where the OPG feel that contact decisions are not being made in the best interests of children.

What this means for Carers

- ▶ The OPG is a great source of support, advocacy and advice for children and young people.
- ▶ The OPG is completely independent of Child Safety (sits administratively under Department of Justice) and can ensure that the decisions being made on behalf of children are safe and appropriate.
- ▶ The OPG is there to act on behalf of children, not carers.

Process

- ▶ If you have exhausted all avenues of internal review/complaint regarding concerns you have, contact the OPG.
- ▶ They can access all the relevant information to guide their intervention if any - they will then deal directly with Child Safety.

Other External Avenues

- ▶ Carers can make complaints through the Qld Ombudsman. The Queensland Ombudsman investigates complaints about state government agencies, local councils and public universities. They also help agencies improve their decision-making and administrative practice.
- ▶ Crime and Corruption Committee - this is an avenue that can only be taken by carers where there is evidence that a crime has taken place or corruption is taking place as defined in legislation.

Continued...

- ▶ The Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) is a statutory body set up to combat and reduce the incidence of major crime and corruption in the public sector in Queensland. Its functions and powers are set out in the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*.

Remember

- ▶ It is your role as a carer to work as part of a Care Team for any child or young person you have in your care.
- ▶ If you have concerns and you feel you are not being listened to, manage this as you would with any other team you are part of; talk with your team members.
- ▶ External avenues for complaint should only be used where you have attempted to address the issues within the Care Team to no avail.

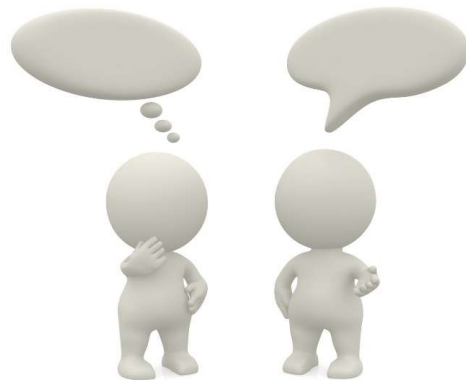
Grief and Loss

- ▶ Grief and Loss is a normal, natural and healthy experience for all carers to go through when saying goodbye to a child or young person in their care.
- ▶ Attachments would of, and should have been formed throughout the course of the placement - our responses to those attachments being broken are very natural and should not be hidden.

How to assist Grief and Loss

Activity:

What are some of the things you do in your families to assist you through your grief and loss and your family's grief and loss.



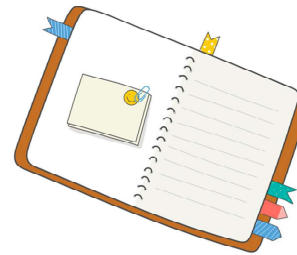
Ideas...

- ▶ Scrapbooking for your own child/ren and child/ren leaving to assist them in creating and holding onto memories.
- ▶ Special celebration dinners.
- ▶ Allow yourself and your family to cry.
- ▶ Prepare special keepsake items to go with child/ren.
- ▶ Know that you have done good and made a difference.



Continue...

- ▶ Allow yourself an escape i.e. have other focuses like a good book so that you can escape the pain because it will hurt.
- ▶ Write about your feelings and encourage your children to do the same.
- ▶ Write a letter to the child and ask the CSO to place it on file for when they reach age of independence.



Continue...

- ▶ If carers and birth parents have been encouraged to develop and maintain relationships throughout the reunification process, children that you are successfully able to reunify home are more likely to continue to be part of your life.
- ▶ The development of these relationships can be key to a successful reunification that is sustained - you may become part of that family's extended network for life. The benefits for the child in this cannot be underestimated as children are encouraged to maintain relationships of significance to them and continue to have a safety net surrounding them through the challenges life will throw at the family.

‘There are so many things I miss about her. But I am so grateful I get to miss them and I didn't miss out on knowing her. She is a treasure that I keep in my heart and someone I will always love’.

<http://anothersmalladventure.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/how-to-say-goodbye-when-you-foster.html>

QFKC Support Team

Would you like to support and advise other carers? Training and support will be provided by QFKC.

Would you like to be involved in community events to support other carers?
Would you like to build stronger networks in your community?

If you are interested in becoming a QFKC Support Team member please let the trainer know and they will provide your details to the coordinator, alternatively ring the QFKC office on 3256 6166



**Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care**

Represent • Advocate • Inform • Support • Excel

Don't miss this great opportunity!

Telephone 32566166
Email admin@qfkc.com.au



Brisbane Office

Unit 7/10 Depot Street

BANYO QLD 4014

Phone: 07 3256 6166

Email: admin@qfkc.com.au

Townsville Office

Ronan Street

VINCENT QLD 4814

Phone: 0400 647 664

Email: jodie.baird@qfkc.com.au

NB: This training is a Queensland Foster and Kinship Care tool.

Policies and Procedures do change over time.

All efforts are made to provide accurate information at time of training.