

Communication Support Guide

BACKGROUND

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care Inc. (QFKC) recognised, through Partners in Care, the need for a communication plan to assist in alleviating communication barriers within the care team – including carers, agency and departmental staff (Child Safety Officers (CSOs)). This was identified in 2017 as one of the strategies; however, this never eventuated. Fast forward to 2024, QFKC has been fortunate to have conducted a pilot trial in five regions within the Retention and Development Program to trial the effectiveness of a Communication Support Guide, which categorises enquiries into three timeframes:

- 7 business days
- 2-4 business days
- 24-hour response

This statewide communication support guide is a combination of all regions that have participated in the pilot trial.

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT GUIDE

The Communication Support Guide is a resource designed to support individuals in communicating effectively with one another to meet the needs of the child and/or young person in the care of a foster or kinship carer. This guide provides the care team with a consensus to have a **shared understanding** of timeframes, escalation processes, and how responses are to be managed appropriately.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Every member in the care team – carers, agency support staff & departmental staff – plays a crucial role in meeting the needs of the child or young person in care. The needs of the child extend to the care arrangement, family-based care, to ensure all supports, documentation, and finances are provided to foster and kinship carers. *For further information on Roles and Responsibilities,*

please refer to the Statement of Commitment (under Additional Resources).

KEY TERMS

LOW: This level indicates the enquiry should be responded within 7 business days from the initial call/email.

MEDIUM: This level indicates the enquiry should be responded within two to four business days from the initial call/email.

HIGH: This level indicates the enquiry should be responded within a 24-hour period from the initial call/email.

Response: When carers or agency support staff inform the CSO or Departmental staff of a situation related to the child or carer, there is an expectation of receiving an acknowledgement email from the CSO or Departmental staff to confirm the message has been read/viewed.

Action: When a carer or agency support staff member requests a response from the Department, the Department should provide a plan overview, including timeframes.

Suppose an action timeframe cannot be provided or is unable to be implemented within the expected timeframe. In that case, a reason is provided to the care team to ensure that all parties understand, especially the foster or kinship carer/s.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

Best practice in using the guide is to have a care team meeting with all parties. This should include the carer/s, agency support staff, CSO, and other individuals to review the guide and identify which dot points are relevant to the child or young person and carer/s.

It is also essential to provide all individuals with a **copy of the current case plan and placement agreement** to ensure that the guide is meeting the needs of the child and placement requirements for

the care team to meet the child or young person's needs.

This meeting will discuss the following:

- The dot points in the guide that are relevant to the child/young person in the care of the carer/s and the care arrangement.
(*You can strike through the irrelevant points*)
- Communication process - open discussion on:
 - A shared understanding of the current care situation,
 - communication expectations,
 - who to contact,
 - an understanding of the escalation process¹ (*Refer to Escalation Process*) and,
 - an understanding of the First Attempt at Resolution.

How will the care team ensure transparent and prompt information, and the expectations on the response/actions become a standard practice?

The purpose of this meeting is to encourage the care team to have a common understanding when discussing the needs of the care arrangement to meet the Standards of Care regarding timely communication, responses, and actions.

When a carer or agency support staff member utilises the guide to contact the Department, all correspondence requires the whole Care Team to be included to ensure all parties are updated with essential information.

There are two streams to initiate communication:

1. Via Email

It is encouraged that when a carer or agency support staff initiates contact with the department regarding the enquiry, it is essential to use the *Key Terms* in the email subject.

2. Via Phone

It is recommended that when a phone call is made with the department, follow-up email be sent regarding the enquiry to establish an email trail and an overview of this initial communication.

ESCALATION PROCESS

Have an open discussion on how the escalation process is implemented in the Child Safety Service Centre. *If you have not received a response in the agreed timeframe, be confident to use the agreed escalation process discussed with the Care Team to escalate the enquiry.*

¹*Note: The escalation processes may vary between regions and Child Safety Service Centres.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



QFKC
Communication Tool
Resource
<https://www.qfkc.com.au/resources/statewide-communication-support-guide>



Delegated decision
making and decision
carers can make
www.qld.gov.au/commUNITY/caring-child/foster-kinship-care/information-for-carers/everyday-caring



Statement of
Commitment
https://www.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/152321/statement-of-commitment.pdf



First Attempt at
Resolution Fact Sheet
<https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/media/documents/contact-us/complaints/cufs-faar.pdf>



QFKC Webinar
Training
<https://www.qfkc.com.au/training>



Child Safety Practice
Manual
www.cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au