

Become a foster or kinship carer





All children and young people deserve to be safe, valued and educated, and to live at home with a caring family.

Foster and kinship carers (carers) open their hearts and homes to children and young people who are unable to live at home with their own families because of abuse or neglect.

Anyone who is willing to provide children and young people with a stable, supportive and nurturing home can apply to become a carer.

Foster carers care for children and young people of different ages and cultural and religious backgrounds. They may provide care for one or two nights, a few months, or even years depending on the child or young person's situation and the carers' capacity.



What is foster and kinship care?

Being a carer means opening your home to children and young people who can't live in their own home because they have experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse or neglect, or are at risk of experiencing one of these forms of harm, or cannot live at home for other reasons.

Children have different needs and require different types of care. The care you provide might be for a few nights, months, years or longer. You might provide emergency care for children or give short breaks to other foster carers. You may have, or develop, special skills or preferences that will influence the type of care you provide. You choose the type of care that will suit you, your family and your lifestyle.

Where possible, children are reunited with their families as soon as possible. Carers are part of this process and help maintain ongoing relationships between children and their families.



Who needs care?

Children coming into foster or kinship care have experienced, or are at risk of, harm and may:

- » be any age up to 18
- » be in sibling groups
- » come from anywhere in Queensland
- » come from any cultural or religious background
- » have special care needs.

There is a real need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become carers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care.

This will ensure they are cared for in a way that respects their culture and assists them to maintain their cultural identity.

What is the role of Child Safety in foster and kinship care?

The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (Child Safety) is the lead child protection agency in Queensland and is required by law to ensure children are safe from abuse, neglect and harm in their homes.

The *Child Protection Act 1999* allows Child Safety to protect children and young people at risk of abuse or neglect by finding safe and caring places for these children to live, depending on their needs.

In accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, Child Safety is committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care are placed with members of their family, their community or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



What are the different types of foster and kinship carers?

There are different types of care that you can provide for a child or young person, and you can choose the level of commitment you are able to make based on your own family situation.

Foster carers

Foster carers look after a child or young person in their own home for short or long periods of time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be cared for in a way that respects their culture and helps them maintain their cultural identity.

Kinship carers

Kinship carers are approved by Child Safety to provide care in their own homes for a relative, family member, close friend, or a member of the child or young person's community.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, a kinship carer may be an Indigenous person who is a member of a similar family group, community, clan, tribe or community that is similar to the child's clan, or from the same language group.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people need to live away from home for their own protection, Child Safety is committed to ensuring their cultural identity and relationship with their families and communities is maintained.

Provisionally approved carers

A person who has applied to become a foster or kinship carer may be provisionally approved as a carer, allowing them to care for a child or young person while their application to be a foster carer or kinship carer is decided. The application should be finalised within 90 days. This type of approval is usually given to family members or other people already well known to a child or young person to enable an immediate placement to be made. Provisional approval is valid for 60 days. It may be extended, but cannot exceed 90 days.

There are a range of different types of care foster, kinship and provisionally approved carers provide.

Short break carers

Short break carers can help children feel more connected to their community, while helping foster and kinship carers to sustain their caring relationship. Being a short break carer is an option for people who can provide short-term care, but may not be able to provide ongoing, day-to-day care for a child.

Short break carers choose when they can provide care, for example on weekends or holidays. New carers may start out as short break carers and become a full-time foster or kinship carer after gaining some experience. This experience can provide a good basis for transition to a full-time carer role.

Short break care is important for children and young people in care, giving them opportunities to extend their support network.

Example: *John and Laura are busy professionals who both work full-time and have two children in high school. They decided to become short break carers and now provide regular care on weekends and school holidays for Jack (5 years old).*



Emergency carers

Emergency carers are available to provide short-term care at short notice for children who urgently need a place to stay. Emergency care may be required when a child first comes into care, or if they need a home while they transition to longer-term care. Emergency carers often have skills to help children who have experienced abuse and trauma. Some carers may consider becoming emergency carers once they have some experience of foster care.

Example: *Tyrone (8 years old) and Sarah (6 years old) needed a safe place to stay at very short notice. They were placed with emergency carers Matt and Lisa for three days while Child Safety arranged a longer-term placement.*

Short-term carers

Short-term carers are full-time foster and kinship carers who provide ongoing, day-to-day care for children for up to two years, while Child Safety is working towards reunifying the child with their family. Being a short-term carer means actively working with the child and Child Safety to progress the child's case plan, so the child can be safely returned to their parents. Short-term carers are responsible for maintaining regular contact between the child and their family.

Example: *Jessica (4 years old) was placed with foster carer Margaret because she was neglected and could not safely be left at home. Margaret cared for Jessica full-time for 18 months while Jessica's parents were undergoing support to enhance their skills to safely care for her. Margaret worked as part of a team with Jessica, her family, Child Safety and other relevant services to safely return Jessica to her parents, when they had demonstrated the ability to protect her from neglect.*

Long-term carers

Long-term carers give children a safe and stable home because they cannot live with their family. Long-term carers commit to the ongoing full-time care of a child up to 18 years of age.

Example: *Paul and Alison are in their early 40s and have been unable to have children. They were interested in caring for a sibling group on a long-term basis. Child Safety placed Luke (5 years old) and Alicia (6 years old) with them. Luke and Alicia have been in care since they were 6 months and 18 months of age respectively, due to their mother's long-term mental illness. Paul and Alison facilitate contact between the children and their mother, when it can occur, a few times each year.*

Intensive foster carers

Intensive foster carers care for children with complex and extreme levels of support needs. Carers receive additional training and support from an intensive foster care service to help meet the needs of children in their care.

Example: *Peter is a 14 year old boy who has a learning disability. He receives intensive support from foster carers Brad and Melissa, and a team of support workers, to meet his health, educational and day-to-day care needs.*



Could you be a carer?

Bringing other people's children into your family can be very rewarding but it may not always be easy. Becoming a carer is a big decision for any family and it's important for you to talk with your family and consider the changes and challenges involved in providing out-of-home care for a child or young person.

We need carers who are male or female, single or a couple, married or in a defacto relationship, and from any cultural background. It's important to have carers from all parts of the community so we can match them to the needs of the children and young people requiring care.

To express your interest in becoming a carer you must be over 18 years of age and eligible to obtain — or already have — a Blue Card.

What makes a good carer?

A good carer is:

- » tolerant, flexible and non-judgmental
- » loving, kind and respectful to children
- » open, honest and patient
- » understanding and able to persevere
- » able to spend time with the children without neglecting their own family
- » willing to learn about ways to best meet the needs of a child in their care
- » able to listen, provide hope, support and encouragement to children
- » able to work as part of a team to help the children and their families meet case plan goals.



Children in care experience trauma upon being separated from their parents. A good carer is able to:

- » respond to the grief and loss that children experience
- » set boundaries and house rules so the children know what is expected of them
- » help children talk about, and maintain connections with, their families and other significant people in their lives
- » support a child's return to their family when it is safe for that to occur.

Before applying to become a foster or kinship carer, you also need to consider:

- » what is happening in your family at this time
- » how your family would adjust to other children in the family
- » how you would cope with a child or young person returning to the care of their parents
- » the lifestyle changes and loss of privacy associated with sharing your home with a child or young person
- » if your relationship is strong enough for you and your partner to work as a team and support one another
- » if you have room in your house for another child.



Rewards and challenges of being a carer

Becoming a carer is a very important decision that will affect your life and the lives of those around you. Experienced carers recognise the personal rewards these roles bring to them and their families, but also acknowledge the many challenges in caring for the children placed with them.

The rewards include:

- » helping to keep children and young people safe
- » helping children and young people reach their full potential
- » helping parents develop new ways of relating to their children
- » using skills and life experiences for the benefit of others
- » enhancing your own parenting skills and knowledge
- » being a highly valued and contributing member of a caring team
- » expanding your social and personal contacts.



The challenges include:

- » managing your own children's feelings about sharing you, their home and their lives
- » responding to children's behaviours that you may not have previously experienced
- » being able to say goodbye to children when they leave to return to their families
- » feeling confident that children will be safe when they leave your care
- » finding space in your life for yourself when so many demands will be made on your time and energy
- » being able to persevere when the observable changes may be small or non-existent
- » sharing the decision-making for the children placed with you.

Experienced carers say the rewards far outweigh the challenges and are most often found in the day-to-day moments they experience through sharing their lives with children.

Foster carer stories

To read stories from carers about their experiences visit qld.gov.au/fostercare.



How are carers supported?

If you decide to become a carer you will be supported in many ways. Community-based foster and kinship care services and Child Safety will work with you to meet the needs of children or young people in your care.

Carers can ask for assistance from Queensland Foster and Kinship Care, an organisation that represents and supports carers. Carers can also receive support from local carers, other families and their community.

Allowances and benefits

Carers receive a fortnightly caring allowance to help with the costs of caring for children in their home.

This covers basic household expenses, food, clothing, gifts, pocket money and entertainment for children in care. The allowance is not considered a 'payment' for caring and is not a source of income. It is a reimbursement toward the real costs of providing care. Short break carers receive the allowance in proportion to the amount of time they provide care for a child.

The caring allowance is not subject to tax and should not be cited as income for any purpose, such as yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits, or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

For more information about the types of carer allowances and carer payment amounts visit the Money Matters section at www.qld.gov.au/community/caring-child/foster-kinship-care/information-for-carers/money-matters.

Other financial support

In addition to the fortnightly caring allowance, financial support is available at the start of a child's care arrangement with you, when costs are likely to be high. Carers receive a one-off establishment payment when a child first comes into care on a Child Protection Order. The payment is to help you to establish the care needs for a child or young person in your care once their care arrangement has been confirmed for more than 7 days.

A one-off start-up allowance is provided to carers to support the initial set up costs for a new care arrangement that is greater than 5 days.

An additional allowance may be provided to carers who have children with high, complex or extreme support needs.

Carers may also be reimbursed for substantial additional costs when these form part of the case plan for the child in care. It is important that these costs are approved by the manager of your Child Safety Service Centre before you purchase goods or services.

Approved carers are also eligible to receive the Carer Business Discount Card. This card assists carers in their day-to-day caring duties by providing access to a range of business discounts throughout Queensland.

Commonwealth Government benefits

As a carer, you may be eligible for Commonwealth Government benefits. The Family Tax Benefit Part A — which is income-tested and paid per child — is the most common payment to help families with the cost of raising children. The Family Tax Benefit B provides extra financial assistance for single parents, non-parent carers such as grandparents and great grandparents, and couples with one main income. You may also be eligible for the Child Care Subsidy, Parental Leave Pay or Parenting Payment.

For more information, call Centrelink on 13 61 50 or visit www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/.



How do you become a carer?

Once you have decided you're interested in becoming a carer, there are a number of steps you will go through to become an approved carer.

The aim of this approval process is to make sure you are:

- » suitable to be a foster or kinship carer, and that all members of your household are suitable to associate with children and young people on a daily basis
- » able to meet the standards of care in the Statement of Standards, outlined in the *Child Protection Act 1999*
- » able to work towards achieving goals for the safety, care and protection of children and young people.

To become a carer, you need to:

1. Complete an Application for Approval form

This will provide important information to Child Safety to help with personal history checks for you and your adult household members. This includes consideration of criminal and child protection history as well as domestic family violence and traffic history.

2. Complete a Blue Card application

This must be completed by applicants and any other adult members of the household.

A Blue Card is a card issued by Blue Card Services and indicates that a person is eligible to work with children and young people in Queensland. To determine a person's eligibility to hold a Blue Card, Blue Card Services conducts a Working with Children Check. This is a detailed national check of a person's criminal history, including any charges or convictions, and any disciplinary information held by certain professional organisations and police investigation information into allegations of serious child-related sexual offences. Find out more about Blue Cards by visiting www.qld.gov.au/community/caring-child/foster-kinship-care/foster-kinship-care-become-a-carer/foster-kinship-care-blue-cards.

3. Complete a household safety study

This will be completed by the person making the assessment and includes mandatory safety requirements that must be met prior to you being approved as a carer.

4. Discretionary checks

Discretionary checks may occur at any point during the assessment, and may include a medical check, referee checks, or employer referee checks if you are in child-related employment.

5. Participate in interviews

These will be conducted by the person making the assessment. You, your children (depending on their age), any adult household members and significant others will be interviewed.

6. Complete Getting ready to start training

This training will provide you with the skills and knowledge you need to commence your role as a carer. Attendance at Getting ready to start training is mandatory for foster carers. Kinship carers are encouraged to attend Getting ready to start training if they wish to.



Approved applicants

If your application is approved by Child Safety you will receive a letter confirming that you have been approved as a foster or kinship carer.

You will also receive a Certificate of Approval as a foster or kinship carer. This is for an initial 12 months and requires renewal every two years thereafter, upon application and approval.

For approved **foster carers**, you will work with Child Safety and your non-government foster and kinship care service to develop a Foster Carer Agreement detailing the support available to help you fulfil your role, ongoing training requirements and the types of care arrangements you are willing to consider.

For approved **kinship carers**, you will work with Child Safety and your non-government foster and kinship care service to develop a Placement Agreement detailing the goals of the care arrangement and the support and training you may need to meet them.

If your application is not approved by Child Safety, you will receive a letter stating the reasons for the decision and your right of review.



Legislative requirements for providing care

The Statement of Standards

The *Child Protection Act 1999* and the *Child Protection Regulation 2011* are the key laws that regulate how the government responds to children and young people in need of care and protection. Foster carers and kinship carers are required to provide a level of care which is consistent with the Statement of Standards outlined in Section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

The Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, non-government foster and kinship care services, and foster and kinship carers are responsible for ensuring that children and young people are cared for in a safe and accountable way.

The statement provides guidelines to ensure that care provided to children and young people meets their immediate and ongoing needs. The statement says that:

- (a) the child's dignity and rights will be respected at all times
- (b) the child's needs for physical care will be met, including adequate food, clothing and shelter
- (c) the child will receive emotional care that allows him or her to experience being cared about and valued, and that contributes to the child's positive self-regard
- (d) the child's needs relating to his or her culture and ethnic grouping will be met
- (e) the child's material needs relating to his or her schooling, physical and mental stimulation, recreation and general living will be met
- (f) the child will receive education, training or employment opportunities relevant to the child's age and ability



- (g) the child will receive positive guidance when necessary to help him or her change inappropriate behaviour; techniques for managing the child's behaviour must not include corporal punishment or punishment that humiliates, frightens or threatens the child in a way that is likely to cause emotional harm
- (h) the child will receive dental, medical and therapeutic services necessary to meet his or her needs
- (i) the child will be given the opportunity to participate in positive social and recreational activities appropriate to his or her developmental level and age
- (j) the child will be encouraged to maintain family and other significant personal relationships
- (k) if the child has a disability, the child will receive care and help appropriate to the child's special needs.

The application of the standards of care must take into account what is reasonable — with regard to the length of time the child is in the care of the carer or care service — and the child's age and development.

The Charter of Rights for a child in care

The Charter of Rights for a child in care, outlined in Schedule 1 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*, describes the fundamental rights that apply to a child who is in the custody or under the guardianship of the Chief Executive of the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

Each child or young person who is in the custody or under the guardianship of the Chief Executive must be told and given written information about the Charter of Rights, depending on their age and ability to understand.

The Charter of Rights states that a child or young person has the right:

- (a) to be provided with a safe and stable living environment
- (b) to be placed in care that best meets their needs and is most culturally appropriate
- (c) to maintain relationships with their family and community
- (d) to be consulted about — and to take part in making — decisions affecting the child's life (having regard to the child's age or ability to understand), particularly decisions about where the child is living, contact with the child's family, and the child's health and schooling
- (e) to be given information about decisions and plans concerning the child's future and personal history, having regard to the child's age or ability to understand
- (f) to privacy including, for example, in relation to the child's personal information
- (g) if the child is under the long-term guardianship of the Chief Executive, to regular review of the child's care arrangements
- (h) to have access to dental, medical and therapeutic services necessary to meet the child's needs
- (i) to have access to education appropriate to the child's age and development
- (j) to have access to job training opportunities and help in finding appropriate employment
- (k) to receive appropriate help with the transition from being a child in care to independence, including, for example, help about housing, access to income support and training and education.

You can find the *Child Protection Act 1999* on the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel website www.legislation.qld.gov.au



The Human Rights Act 2019

The *Human Rights Act 2019* came into effect on 1 January 2019 and requires public entities to consider human rights in all decision-making and action, and to only limit human rights in circumstances where it is necessary and lawful to do so and limited only to the extent necessary. Under the *Human Rights Act 2019* it is important to note that foster and kinship carers are considered public entities. For more information on this please visit the Queensland Human Rights Commission website www.qhrc.qld.gov.au.



Who do you contact for more information?

Call the Foster Carer Recruitment Line on **1300 550 877**.

Visit **www.qld.gov.au/becomefosterkinshipcarer** to find out more about becoming a foster or kinship carer.