Contact

Direction to staff

This document provides overarching principles by which Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) make contact arrangements for children in out of home care. All staff must comply with it.

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the term 'child' or 'children' also refers to 'young person' or 'young people'. The term 'children in care' refers to 'children in out of home care'.

Purpose of this document

This policy outlines the process by which contact arrangements are made for a child, in accordance with the circumstances of:

- the goal and stage of case management activities;
- the views and wishes of the child;
- the child's attachment relationships;
- the child's cultural and spiritual needs; and
- the child's right to permanency planning.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff within CYPS who provide case management and contribute to decision making for a child in out of home care.

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Policy statement

Within the context of the *Children and Young People Act 2008* (the Act), contact is one mechanism to support a child who is in an out of home care placement (care placement) to:

- maintain important connections[1] for the child;
- support restoration with a parent;
- maintain and preserve an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child's identity, and their connections to family, community and culture (as per the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle); and
- assess a specific aspect of the parent/child and their relationship.

Contact arrangements will support the stage of CYPS involvement and therefore the case management goals of Care Plan and Case Plan. For example, where the Care Plan goal is two-fold: restoration and concurrent permanency planning, contact arrangements will have a dual purpose of *maintaining connections* as well as *supporting restoration*. When the purpose of case management is family preservation, restoration, permanence or transition, the purpose of contact will always include *maintaining connections*.

When developing a child's contact arrangements, case managers must assess the needs and wishes of the child in respect to contact and determine the appropriate frequency, location and duration of contact. To determine the frequency of contact, the child's age and geographical distance between the child and their parent or the significant person will need to be considered. Case managers are required to refer to the recommended minimum frequencies for contact when developing contact arrangements.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, all decisions must be informed by section 10 of the Act, which allows for submissions made on behalf of the child by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or organisations to be considered as part of the decision-making process.

For children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, parents and families will be supported to access information in a form which is accessible to them, and decisions will be informed by relevant community groups and advocates.

When appropriate, parents and families may be financially supported to attend and engage positively during contact.

[1] Connections includes; relationships with family and extended family as well as people who are important to the child, spiritual and cultural connections including (but not limited to); connection to country, place and history, as well as spirit, lore, knowledge and cultural obligations.

Where carers or family members cannot supervise contact, visits may be supervised by a support worker. Supervised contact visits may be documented and the records shared with relevant parties, such as CYPS and the parents.

Under limited circumstances, it will be necessary to use contact visits to inform specific assessments (e.g. restoration). Using a child's time with their family to inform a formal assessment process is not a positive or ideal circumstance. On this basis, using a contact visit for assessment should only be used under limited circumstances and over a short period of time.

Contact arrangements can be reviewed quarterly where relevant and at least annually to ensure visits are beneficial to the child. A CYPS delegate will approve all contact arrangements based on input from, and the recommendations of, the child's case manager, out of home care service provider and other members of the child's Care Team. Final decisions about contact arrangements may also be made by the Childrens Court when 'contact' provisions are stipulated by a **contact provision**.

If there are any proposals to change contact arrangements when final Care and Protection Orders have been made, the Care Team should be consulted and a collaborative decision made. If there are any proposals to change contact arrangements when final Care and Protection Orders have been made, the Care Team should be consulted and a collaborative decision made.

Policy principles

This policy establishes that contact arrangements will be:

- consistent with the child's 'best interests' as stipulated by section 349
- recognise the child's voice and reflect their views and wishes as far as it is safe to do so
- consistent with the aims and objectives of the child's Cultural Plan
- reflective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's views, wishes and needs through a cultural lens to ensure the child's voice is heard
- developed in partnership with all Care Team members ideally in the context of a meeting of the care team (CPCC or case conference)
- an opportunity for meaningful, regular and quality contact between the child and their parents and family, and ensure those contacts are supported to meet the needs of all involved
- stipulated in the child's Case Plan and updated as required (including purpose of contact)
- aligned with the goal of the child's Case Plan (restoration, permanence, statutory intervention, adoption)
- provided in writing to all Care Team members
- decided by team using a methodology which is consistent across both CYPS and ACT Together
- flexible in respect of changing circumstances in a child's life (including when family members are sick or a child needs extra support)
- consistent with the principles of the *Children and Young People Act 2008*.

Related materials

The following materials directly relate to this policy.

Legislation

- *Children and Young People Act 2008*

Procedures and practice guides

- Procedure: Cultural plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Procedure: Contact
- Procedure: Restoration
- Practice guide: Developing contact arrangements
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families: Providing Culturally Responsive Practice

Document information

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Version history

The following table details the published date and amendment details for this document.

Date	Amendment details
21/12/2020	Updated version of the policy published.
14/07/2021	Updated content to align with the *Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families: Providing Culturally Responsive Practice* Guide and highlight active efforts.
25/01/2022	Updated to align with the updated Contact procedure

Definitions

For definitions of terms used in this document, access the CYPS glossary.