Carers as Custodians of Children’s Connections
Safe and meaningful connections with family members children don’t live with

The custodian role includes:

- Understanding who the child’s family is and nurturing those relationships
- Speaking warmly and respectfully about family members
- Understanding that these relationships are important
- Finding out what the child thinks and feels about family time and helping them to communicate their preferences

When children are in out-of-home care, maintaining relationships with children’s family members can be complex and challenging but it’s important not to give up and disconnect. Children who are disconnected from family members can feel grief, rejection, curiosity and a yearning to know more about them. Without efforts to mend relationships, the distress of disconnection can become intergenerational.

Meaningful family relationships can help children heal from emotional trauma and develop a strong sense of who they are.

Carers are the custodians of children’s connections to their family members when they are in out-of-home care.

Carers need to hold these connections so they can be passed on to the child and they can carry those relationships with them over their lifespan.

For more information contact: Research Centre for Children and Families, Sydney School of Education and Social Work
e rccf.research@sydney.edu.au  w sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html
Developed as part of the ARC Linkage project Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care (LP180101332)
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Safer meaningful connections with family

Why is Family Time important for children in care?

Family Time is an important way for children in care to build and maintain relationships with their extended family members. These relationships are important for many reasons:

- To understand their past and why they have come into care
- To work through feelings of grief, loss or denial and reach a sense of resolution
- To reassure the child about how family members are going and that they are thinking about them
- To build strong connections with family members including siblings and grandparents
- To build their sense of trust in others and capacity to sustain future relationships.
- To develop a cohesive sense of identity that integrates their origins with family
- To restore a relationship so that past issues can be addressed

Family Time can be challenging:

- IF carers don’t actively support children’s relationships with their families
- IF the child’s physical and emotional safety isn’t being supported
- IF children know that their two families can’t get along
- IF families have difficulty coming to terms about the child not returning home

A consistent message from research is that children need a good sense of identity and family time can be an important way for that to happen.

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Caseworkers can support carers to build positive relationships with the child’s family.

Don’t give up. Seek support to keep relationships going as the long term benefits can outweigh the challenges.