

# 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.**

## The custodian role includes:

Honouring and celebrating these relationships including displaying photos



Sharing special photos and stories about the child with family members that the child would like to share



Committing to a routine for keeping siblings in touch that matches their changing needs



Keeping the lines of communication open so that as the child gets older, they have the option to pursue these relationships for themselves



# Carers as Custodians of Children's Connections

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 **build strong connections** with family members including siblings and grandparents

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.

To **understand their past** and why they have come into care

To **build their sense of trust** in others and capacity to sustain future relationships.

To **work through feelings** of grief, loss or denial and reach a sense of resolution

To **develop a cohesive sense of identity** that integrates their origins with family

To **reassure the child** about how family members are going and that they are thinking about them

To **restore a relationship** so that past issues can be addressed

Research tells us that children need to feel they belong to both their families and that they don't have to choose between them. Remember every child has unique circumstances and any risks posed to children during family time need to be effectively managed.

**IF** carers don't actively support children's relationships with their families

**IF** the child's physical and emotional safety isn't being supported

Family Time can be challenging:

**IF** children know that their two families can't get along

**IF** families have difficulty coming to terms about the child not returning home

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

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