



Family caring for family

An information guide for family members considering caring for children within their family network (when Child Safety is involved)

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Family caring for family

All families go through tough times somewhere along the way. Parents and their children often find their way through a crisis or rough patch with the help of extended family, friends and local communities.

Sometimes, the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (Child Safety) may need to become involved, and stay involved for a while, to help protect and care for children while supporting their parents and family to become strong again.

Child Safety is Queensland's statutory child protection agency. This means they are required by law to ensure that children have a parent who is able and willing to protect them from significant harm. If children are unable to be at home because their parents can't look after them or because they are at risk of harm, Child Safety and other support services will work with family members to see if a relative can care for them.

If Child Safety becomes involved with a family related to you, and they are talking with you about the possibility of being formally approved to care for the children, then this information guide is for you.¹

It will help you think through what's involved in family caring for family when Child Safety is involved, so you can make an informed decision about what this means for you and your household. You may also find this guide useful if you have recently been approved by Child Safety to care for a family member's children and they are already living with you.

This guide will help you learn more about what to expect, and what's expected of you in caring for children related to you. You'll find out about:

- what can be involved for you and your household when family cares for family
- working with Child Safety and other services
- common questions from other families in this situation
- what you need to know and do
- what help is available for you
- useful local and statewide services.

Introduction

You're reading this guide because you're thinking about caring for children related to you who are at risk of harm from abuse or neglect, and Child Safety has become involved with the family.

You may already have been approached or approved by Child Safety to care for the children. Often, this situation can result from events that have happened very quickly, with little warning. It may also be something you have seen coming for a while.

Either way, it's usually an emotional and uncertain time for you, the children and their parents, and your wider family. It can be helpful to know that many families in Queensland find themselves in these circumstances. This guide draws on their experiences and thoughts to help you decide whether you can support your family by caring for children related to you.

You'll probably hear workers from Child Safety or other agencies talk about 'relative care' or 'kinship care'. These are terms to describe family caring for family. The terms 'relative carer' or 'kinship carer' refer to a relative who is approved by Child Safety to care for a child who cannot live at home for safety reasons.

When family members care for children related to them, they are supporting both the children and their parents. Caring for a relative's children not only protects the children but also reassures their parents they are being well looked after while they rebuild their family. It can offer safety and security for both the children and their parents while the issues affecting the family are being addressed.



Your family's situation

No family's situation is ever exactly the same and yet there are many common experiences when family care for family.

You may be one of the many grandparents in Australia whose grandchildren live with them, or you may be an aunt or uncle, cousin or older sibling of the children who need care.

You may intend to care for the children by yourself or have the support of a partner or other family members, making this a shared responsibility. You may know the children need long-term care or will only be with you for a few months or a year. Perhaps there is no certainty about this as yet.

You might have known there were problems for the children at home but not aware of the details until Child Safety, the police, the children or their parents asked you about providing care. Or, you may have come forward to offer care once you became aware of Child Safety's involvement with the children and their parents. Perhaps you've been heavily involved in helping the children and their parents for some time, and now that Child Safety is saying the children need to live outside their home, you wish to help. You may know the parents and their children very well, only a little, or sometimes, not at all, even though you're a relative.

You may be reading this guide with a few weeks, or just a couple of days, to consider your decision about caring for the children. You may even have the children already staying with you. No matter what your situation may be, you'll probably have mixed feelings. You and the members of your family may feel overwhelmed by loss and grief at this time and it's common to feel anger or irritation. Other people in similar situations talk about feeling:

- motivated by love, care and connection to look after their relative's children, but worried about the responsibilities that will come from stepping in to do this, including financial, legal and family responsibilities
- prepared to do this out of family loyalty or duty and because the children need family (*'we are the child's family, if it's not us it will be strangers!'*) but also reluctant, frustrated or annoyed about having to do this (*'how will this affect us, our children, our finances and future plans?'*)

- sadness for the children, anger and worry for their parents, and concern about how to manage family relationships, especially if caring for the children creates or intensifies any family conflict
- apprehensive about what's happened to the children, the impacts on their health and behaviour and whether this will be difficult to cope with (*'will we be able to manage this?'*)
- their own sense of guilt about what's happened with the children and their parents, or feeling blamed by others for this
- anxious to help but annoyed, embarrassed or ashamed at having Child Safety and other services involved and knowing about family problems.

It's important that you and other people in your family are aware these sorts of feelings are common and will change over time as everyone adjusts to new circumstances. There are big changes happening for the children, their parents and your household and it takes time, energy and support to get through this. It can be useful to talk about this with other family members or with friends.

Your family's situation: discussion topics for you and your household

- Why are you considering caring for your relative's children? What's important to you, what would you like to achieve in doing this? Remember, different people in your household can have different reasons for getting involved in family caring for family and it can be helpful to talk about these together.
- What worries or concerns do you or other members of your household have about taking on this role? What ideas do you have about how these could be managed — what or who could help?



Children and their experience

Even though you're family and you may know the children very well, there's likely to be much you don't know about what's happened for them and the effect of this, now and in the future.

When children have experienced trauma, it can take a lot of time and effort by caring adults to build the trust needed to know more about what has happened and how this has affected them.

Children who need to live away from home for their own safety will often experience huge amounts of change in a short period of time. Even though this is for their protection it can also bring much loss. They're no longer living with their parents and sometimes are no longer with their siblings either. They've moved house, and sometimes suburb or town, which can mean leaving belongings, pets, their school and friends behind. Everything that's familiar can feel like it's been lost. Children who have been in this situation say that being able to live with a known family member can help ease the sense that everything in their world has changed all at once. Being with family when they can't be in their own home offers comfort, connection and belonging.

This experience of loss and disruption helps explain why children often feel sad, scared, anxious and angry, even if also relieved to be away from what has hurt or frightened them. They can feel isolated and alone, even though they're related to you and may know you well. They might be okay about living with you but, at the same time, be sad and upset about not being with their parents. They can feel responsible for what's happened at home, protective and defensive of their parents, worried about their siblings and sensitive to any family conflicts. These feelings can show up in different ways.

Some children can be very clingy, while others will be withdrawn and hard to reach. Some children may be quiet or anxious to please and do everything they're asked. Others can be loudly disagreeable and defiant or have challenging behaviours like tantrums, running away, stealing or hoarding food. Their ability to listen, remember and concentrate can be affected. Sleep can be disturbed, and their health and development disrupted. You may see extreme behaviours you haven't seen before, or the children may seem totally unaffected by what's happened.

The behaviours of children who have experienced trauma can be a real challenge for anyone to cope with, and specialist help is often available. Sometimes, family members caring for children related to them are reluctant to ask for help because they feel inadequate or are worried Child Safety or other services may think they're not coping. It's important to ask for help when you need it and to keep asking until you get the help you need. There's a wide range of help and specialist support available from government and community services. Talking with your Child Safety Officer or your kinship care support worker is the best place to start in finding the help you need.

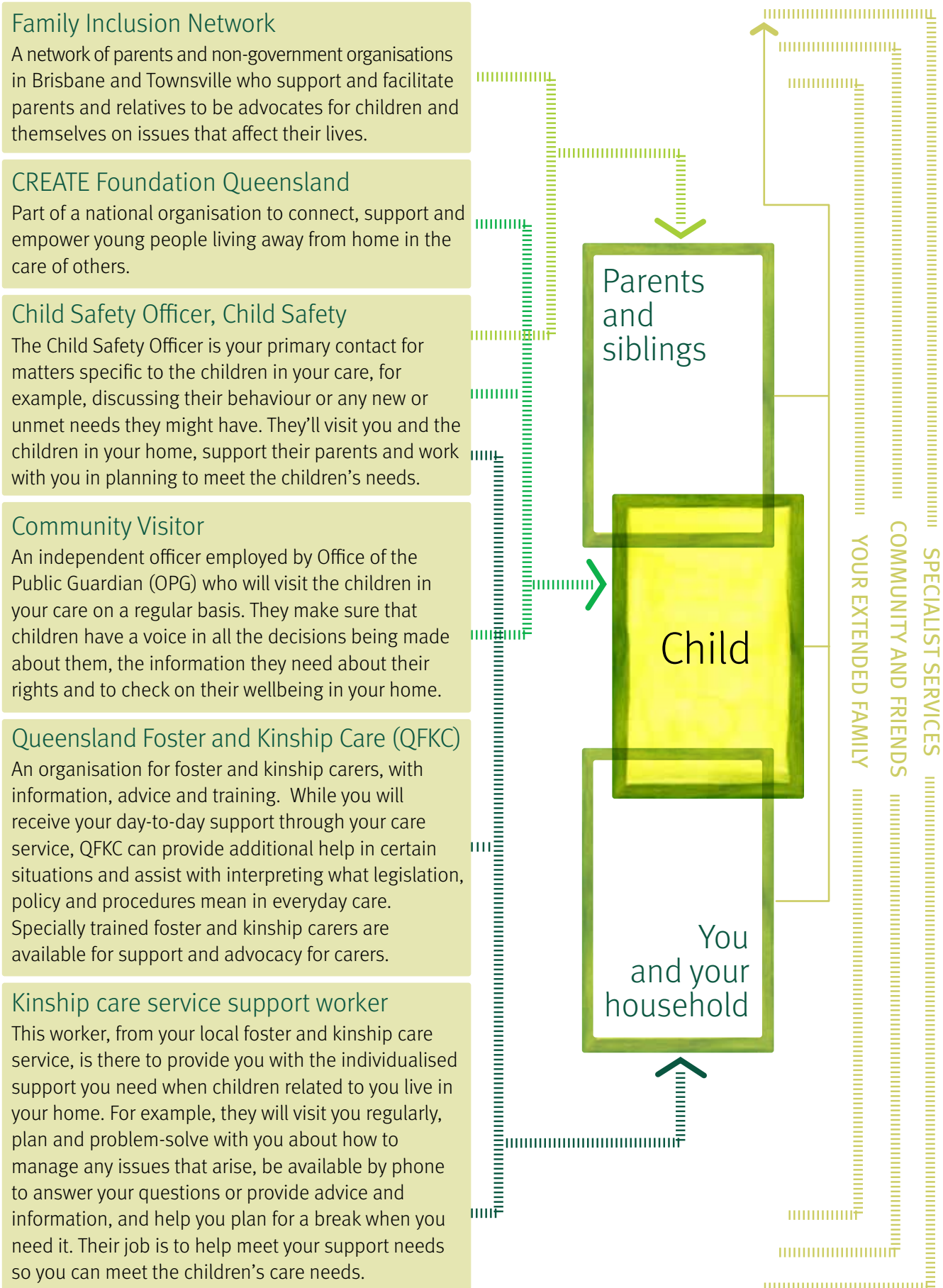
Children need to feel safe as well as be safe, and having trusting relationships with caring and responsive adults are the key to helping children cope with their situation. Even though you're family and being with someone known and familiar will provide some comfort to the children, it still takes time and persistence to establish this sense of safety. Once children feel safe they can start to heal and their behaviours will begin to settle. Only after they feel safe can they learn and grow.

Relatives caring for children and supporting their parents also need help from others. Supporting children who have been hurt, to heal, recover and grow strong and helping their parents is too big a job for anyone to do on their own. You'll need to connect with other people you know and trust, from your family, friendship and community networks. At times, you'll need to reach outside these networks to government and non-government services to help you, the children, their parents and your family, that is, the child protection system. Figure 1 shows the key roles and services in the child protection system to support everyone involved in family caring for family.

Children and their experience: discussion topics for you and your household

- How much do you know about the children you may be caring for? Do you know their strengths and abilities, their likes and dislikes? What activities do they enjoy? Where can you get this information from?
- How much do you know about how the children have been affected by what's happened to them? What do you know about any special needs, their physical and emotional health, or their behaviour? Can you ask Child Safety or another service to discuss this with you and your household?
- Think about your existing relationship with the children and what you know about their circumstances at home. What ideas do you have about how to make them feel safe, comfortable and secure if living in your home? Who could help you think this through?

Figure 1: Support services for you, the children and their parents in the child protection system





Benefits and challenges in caring for children related to you

As with most things in life, taking on the care of children related to you will bring benefits and rewards as well as some challenges. The experiences of others can be useful in having some sense of what you, your household and wider family might encounter.

Benefits and rewards

People who are already caring for children related to them say the benefits and rewards include:

- being able to keep grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews and cousins growing up with family and not living with people they don't know or who are not related to them
- knowing that children you love are well looked after and you make a difference to their lives
- being able to help people you care about — the children and their parents — maintain and rebuild their relationship so that children know they're cared about by their parents even if they can't be cared for them
- enjoying a close bond and connection with the children you care for.

Children say that when they're cared for by relatives they feel:

- loved and cared about by their family
- 'normal' because they live with their family like everyone else
- safer and more comfortable living with a relative instead of with strangers
- a sense of ongoing connection to family history, stories and shared memories
- a sense of real belonging from being kept together with family and staying connected to culture
- a sense of certainty and security — family will stick by them more than strangers would.

Relative approved to care for children:

“ Knowing that they are with family and loved is a payoff and award for all the challenges. It is 100% worth it. ”

Children who have lived with related family:

“ I have a bond with him (grandfather) that I can't have with anyone else. I felt like I belonged at my grandads. With foster carers I felt like a kid in care, with my grandad I felt like a part of the family. ”

“ I was able to get help, the support I needed and being able to feel like a normal person. I was a bit freer with a family member than when I was in foster care. I was able to connect more with other family members. The bonding grew strong. I felt safer and more comfortable with my Auntie than with a foster carer. ”

Parents say they feel better knowing their children are loved and living with family, not strangers.

Parents:

“ It was definitely easier knowing he was with family... It made it easier for the whole of our family, our other kids, knowing he was with Auntie and Uncle, rather than strangers. ”

“ We were close with them before everything happened. So that helped hugely. The fact that he was able to spend time with his cousins instead of strangers and he will still have a relationship with them now that everything's over. Because they are family. ”

“ I'm not worrying about him — my mind is at ease — he's looked after. ”

Research supports the positive experiences that families report. It shows that children living with approved relatives are more likely to be kept with their siblings and maintain other family relationships, which promotes greater wellbeing. Living with people they know and trust reduces the trauma that comes from living with strangers. They appear to experience fewer behavioural problems and have greater stability in their living situation (fewer moves).

Costs and challenges

Caring for children related to you can also bring a fairly unique set of challenges and even some costs. It's important to think about what these might be in your situation. People who have experienced this before have said these can include:

- big changes to your life circumstances, social activities and future plans, including juggling what the children need on a daily basis with other responsibilities like your own children or your job
- changes in your role and relationship with the children, for example, being a grandparent or aunty who now takes on a 'parenting' role, or an older sister now 'parenting' a younger sibling
- feeling torn between your relationship with the children and your relationship with their parents and working out how to support them both at the same time, particularly if there are restrictions on contact between the children and their parents
- dealing with impacts on extended family relationships from what's happened for the children and their parents, which sometimes involve loyalty conflicts, anger and hurt feelings
- having ongoing contact with relatives of the children from both their mother's and father's families — people you may not know or have little in common with
- learning how to look after children who have experienced trauma and sometimes having to approach their care differently to how you've cared for your own children
- unexpected financial costs, such as the need for a new car to carry the children around
- finding the help and information you need, when you need it
- a sense of intrusion because workers from different government and community services need to visit your home and ask questions about your family life and circumstances. It can be frustrating if the workers you need to liaise with change (for example, a change of job)
- lack of control and frustration because there are legal requirements you need to meet in caring for the children and you can't make all the decisions for the children within the family — you are now part of a system where Child Safety and others are also involved.

Older sister approved to care for younger sister:

“ It is a lot of personal sacrifice with many sleepless nights and emotional dilemmas. Make sure you have a good support system and do self-care activities... As long as you are a safety net for them (the children) at the end of the day, 9 times out of 10 it will turn out okay. ”

Young woman who lived with a relative as a child:

“ There will be really tough times [in supporting the young person and interactions with Child Safety] but you will get through it. Don't overthink it, you will get through it. ”

“ They may be family but make sure you're not taking too much on your plate. You may feel like you need to take them because they are family but it may be too much than you can handle. ”

Children and young people have said challenges can arise when government or non-government agencies assume that because they're living with relatives everything is going okay. They say that *'more support needs to be available with kinship care kids, because stuff does mess up and get crazy and hectic'*.

Parents say it can be hard when people (their own parents or siblings) who have been supporting them are now caring for their children. This can put a bit of pressure on everyone involved.

Parents:

“ When he was first put in their care my family was keeping him safe — away from me. I was a dangerous person. Now I'm sorting myself out and they are letting me see him more. They did what was best for my son. ”

“ I wasn't allowed to talk to my own family — not ring her (my mother) for Mother's Day, couldn't spend Christmas together, only if she contacted me and when she did my son wasn't with her. ”

Even with these challenges, family members who care for children related to them often feel a strong sense of joy and satisfaction in making a difference. However, it's also really important that everyone in your household thinks about what you can manage and what part you could best play in the children's lives.

Benefits and challenges: discussion topics for you and your household

Caring for children related to you will bring rewards, while also posing challenges. If you decide to go ahead, knowing the benefits will keep you motivated, while support will help in managing the challenges:

- What do you and others in your household think will be the benefits and challenges you might encounter in your particular family situation?
- How would you go about managing these challenges if you decide to go ahead with caring for children related to you? What help do you think you might need and who would be available to do this? Can you ask your worker from Child Safety or your support service how other families have managed similar challenges?
- If full-time care of children related to you is not right for your household, is there other support you can offer the children and their parents? Can you help other relatives who might be able to do this?



Common questions

Many people have similar questions when deciding whether to apply to care for children they are related to.

These include:

1. Why does Child Safety need to be involved if we can care for our relative's child?
2. How is caring for children different when Child Safety remains involved with families?
3. What's the process for approving relatives to care for children from their family?
4. What's expected of me? What do I need to do?
5. What decisions am I responsible for? What do I need to check with Child Safety or others?
6. Who can help me and how?
7. Is financial assistance available?
8. What other support is available for the children, their parents and my family?

1. Why does Child Safety need to be involved if we can care for our relative's children?

This question is often asked by many families, particularly as it's not uncommon for people in the community caring for children related to them by family arrangement without involvement from Child Safety. If children can be looked after by their relatives, it can be hard to understand why Child Safety remains involved. Sometimes, families feel this is an unnecessary intrusion into matters they can handle themselves. If this is the case for you, it helps having some information about how the child protection system works. You can also ask your Child Safety Officer to explain why they need to stay involved with your family.

Child Safety is required by law to ensure that children are able to be looked after safely at home. If Child Safety is told children are being hurt or unable to be looked after safely at home, and may need protection, they will investigate to assess the situation.²

If the worries about the children are confirmed, Child Safety will help the family, wherever possible, so that the children can be safely cared for by their parents.³ However, where the risk of harm means the children cannot be looked after at home, either during the investigation or after completion of the assessment, Child Safety and other non-government support services will work with family members to identify a relative who can care for them. Wherever possible, Child Safety tries to keep children with family members to help them feel more secure, reduce trauma and reassure their parents they are okay while away from home. Child Safety will help the children, their parents and relatives to work out the best arrangements for the children’s care.

Sometimes, parents will agree to their children living somewhere else while they get help to sort out the issues and circumstances that are harmful for the children.

Where this happens quickly and successfully, ongoing involvement by Child Safety may not be required. Other times, parents do not want their children to live away from home, or Child Safety believes it will take some time to make their home safe for the children. In these situations, Child Safety may apply for orders from a magistrate or court to help protect the children while continuing to help their family. These orders may be in place from just a few days or several weeks, or up to a number of years. When these orders give custody of the children to Child Safety, this makes Child Safety responsible for where they live and for approving ‘suitable’ people to care for them while they can’t live with their parents.

Figure 2: The types of child protection orders

| TYPE OF ORDER | PURPOSE | DURATION |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Temporary Assessment Order (TAO) Made by a Magistrate</p> | <p>Allows Child Safety to investigate and assess harm or risk of harm to the children and make sure they are safe while this happens. If the order includes temporary custody, this means the children will live elsewhere while this occurs. Child Safety is responsible for the arrangements for the children’s care.</p> | <p>Usually 3 days but can be extended up to another 3 days if needed, or longer in certain circumstances.</p> |
| <p>Court Assessment Order (CAO) Made by the Children’s Court</p> | <p>Allows Child Safety to investigate and assess harm or risk of harm to the children and make sure they are safe while this happens. If the order includes temporary custody, this means the children will live elsewhere while this occurs. Child Safety is responsible for the arrangements for the children’s care.</p> | <p>28 day after being brought to court. Can be extended up to another 28 days if required.</p> |
| <p>Child Protection Orders: <i>Custody Order</i> — this requires Child Safety, or a family member, to be responsible for the day-to-day care of the children <i>Guardianship Order</i> — this requires Child Safety, a family member, or another person that the court thinks is suitable to be the child’s guardian Made by the Children’s Court</p> | <p>A Child Protection Order is made if the Childrens Court believes a child is in need of protection from harm or risk of harm.</p> <p>Usually, the magistrate will make a Child Protection Order if they believe that the children’s parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can’t safely care for the children at home • are not willing and able to let Child Safety help them to keep the children safe. | <p>Child Protection Orders can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short — lasting up to 2 years • long — lasting until the children turn 18 years old. |

2. How is caring for children different when Child Safety remains involved with families?

The involvement of Child Safety can be of great help to you, but it can also feel like it complicates life too.

When you're approved by Child Safety to care for children related to you, you share the responsibility for providing care. You'll also have a support worker from a local foster and kinship care service working alongside you (refer to Figure 1 about their role).

Child Safety and your kinship care support service are there to assist you in caring for the children and can provide help your family may not be able to get in other ways. Examples of this include someone to talk to, financial assistance, access to respite help so you may have a break from your responsibilities, and connection with other kinship carers caring for children in their family. You become part of a team in planning and problem-solving for the care of the children, while providing support for their parents. All of this can be very helpful to you in meeting the needs of the children and their parents. It can make a real difference to getting the support children and their parents need to be okay in the future.

However, family life is usually private, with families choosing who they share information with and who they invite into their homes and lives. So it can be confronting to have private matters openly talked about — in meetings at offices or in front of people you've only just met — and that people outside the family now have a say in these matters.

Life can get a bit tricky when you think there are things that you or other family members should be able to decide about the children, but you realise that Child Safety or other non-government organisations need to be involved in this decision-making. For example, planning with Child Safety and other services how often the children can see their parents, where and when, especially if there are differing views about this. What can also feel hard is realising that things that have always been a natural part of family life, such as another family member having the children for a sleepover or you taking the children interstate for a holiday with you, may now have to be approved by Child Safety first.

Other ways life can feel complicated may be when there's information you need but can't get. Or when there is confusion about what you can do in certain situations, either because information is unclear or because you've been given different information from different workers.

There's no way of avoiding some uncertainty, confusion and feelings of intrusion in these situations. In fact, it's probably helpful to accept that you'll experience this at some point along the way. The best way to work through this is to have a good partnership with your Child Safety Officer and your kinship care support worker. This doesn't mean that you'll always agree on everything or that problems won't arise, but it does mean that you're committed to working it out together.

3. What's the process for approving relatives to care for children from their family?

Child Safety will meet with you first to discuss the children's needs and their family's circumstances. If you wish to go ahead, you'll be given information about the assessment process. This assessment process is different for foster carers where they are assessed to care for **any** child needing care. You and your household will only be assessed to care for the children related to you.

You might hear workers say the purpose of this process is to make sure that children will be cared for by a 'suitable person'. As a relative of the children and their parents, and perhaps someone who has always been closely involved in their lives, you may find this language a bit strange or even insulting. You may feel that as a loving grandmother or aunty, or other close adult family member, that your 'suitability' to care for the children should be clear. However, as Child Safety is responsible by law for making sure children live with people who can care for them safely and well, the use of 'suitable person' is simply a legal term.

The assessment process is a valuable opportunity for you and your Child Safety Officer or kinship care support workers to jointly explore:

- what will be involved in looking after the children and supporting their family
- how this arrangement might work for the children, their parents, you and your household.

Some important questions to talk about together include:

- When you think about what the children need and their family's circumstances, what do you think will be fairly easy to manage?
- What do you think you'll need help with? Is there anything that worries you?
- What specifically would help with these worries? Can you and the worker plan now for this help?

The assessment process is also the time to think about whether bringing the children to live in your household really is 'right' for you. Sometimes, family members want so much to help the children and their parents that they set aside any worries they have about how this will work, or even whether this will work. Allow yourself time to think through if this truly is a workable option for the children, their parents and your household, or if it might be best for you to help the children and their family in some other way? Either way, talking about any worries or pressures during the assessment process is a good time to work out how to manage them in the future.

If the children need to be cared for urgently, you will be assessed for **provisional approval**. This allows the children to live with you straightaway while a more comprehensive assessment — called an **initial assessment** — is carried out.

If children do not need immediate care, provisional approval is not required. Provisional approval can last up to a maximum of 90 days, during which time the initial assessment is undertaken.

The provisional approval process involves visiting your home and usually includes:

- confirming your interest in caring for the children (called an **expression of interest**) and also your identity (called an **identity check**)
- conducting a **household safety study** — this is simply a check of your house and property to make sure your home is safe for the children to live in (particularly in relation to their age or any special needs) and meets safety requirements for things such as pools, smoke alarms, hot water systems and electrical switch safety. It also looks at your commitment to safe practices around children, for example, storing medicines securely and out-of-reach of children
- discussions with the children, their parents, you and other family members to hear everyone's views and thoughts about how it will work for the children to be cared by you in your household. This includes what support you may need in doing this

- thinking about the specific care needs of each of the children and your capacity to meet these needs, such as providing food, clothing and shelter. The children are likely to have individualised care needs, or perhaps higher levels of need because of the impact of trauma and separation from their parents. This is the time to start thinking about how well you could meet these needs.

If any concerns arise about you or any other adult member of your household that may affect your suitability to care for the children, your Child Safety Officer will discuss them with you.

The initial assessment is undertaken by support workers from the kinship care service, or people organised by the care service, sometimes with Child Safety Officers. This usually takes more time than provisional approval and includes visits to your home, meetings with workers and other professionals and phone calls to:

- complete an application form, a health and wellbeing questionnaire and a medical check by a General Practitioner
- finalise the household safety study
- organise a ‘working with children’ check for you and other adults living in your household. This is a national check of a person’s criminal history, including any charges or convictions, as well as any disciplinary information held by certain professional organisations. It also includes police investigation information into allegations of serious child-related sexual offences. This check is needed to obtain a ‘Blue Card’ from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (Blue Card Services). This card indicates a person is eligible to work with children in Queensland. Every relative approved to care for children and every adult resident in their household must have a Blue Card
- undertake checks of child protection history and personal history for you and other adults living in your home
- obtain information from referees — people who are a good source of information about you, your life and ability to care for children
- further discuss your ability to provide care for the children and meet their needs
- consider what assistance you and your household may need to do this.

The worker conducting the assessment with you will complete a report for the Child Safety Service Centre Manager who will give approval for relatives to care for children. A renewal assessment will occur one year after the date of the initial assessment approval and then every two years.

This assessment process may seem daunting. Children who have been cared for by families highlight the importance of a thorough process.

“ I think there needs to be more checks before someone becomes a kinship carer. ”

“ Child Safety should be involved with how we are settling in with the house... Child Safety should give as much support to the kinship kids as they do to foster kids. ”

“ If you are applying to be a kinship carer, be patient and stay calm. Don’t work yourself up about long periods of waiting times. ”

You can always talk to your Child Safety Officer or care service worker to find more information about the assessment process.

Assessment and approval process: discussion topics for you and your household

By now, you will know this assessment process helps ensure the children will be well looked after. However it can still seem a bit overwhelming and you may be worried that it will be very intrusive. You may feel like you and your life are being examined. This can be hard, but it can be even harder if you're still coming to terms with what's happened for the children and their parents, and you're feeling sad and worried.

- Talk with everyone in your household about what may be involved in this process so that everyone knows what to expect.
- Find out what worries people in your household have about the assessment process and talk with your kinship care support worker or Child Safety Officer about these and what might help them.

4. What's expected of me? What do I need to do?

Care for the children safely and well

As a relative, you're motivated to look after the children because you love and care about them, you want them and their parents to be well and happy and you want to help your family look after its own. When Child Safety is involved, they share your concern about the children and family's wellbeing and are responsible for the quality of care children receive when living away from home.

It's important that you and your Child Safety Officer talk about what the children's care needs are and how well you believe you can meet these needs. This is because Child Safety is responsible for making sure that children living away from home receive a certain level or standard of care.

Child Safety needs to make sure that relatives approved to care for children know about the standards for their care which are set by law (section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*). You may hear Child Safety and care support services also call these the *Statement of Standards*. These standards are based on reasonable and widely held community expectations about the quality of care children should receive. To care safely and well for children, these standards must be met every day.

Together with Child Safety, care support services, the children's parents and other family members, you're responsible for meeting these standards in caring for the children. It's important that you, your family, Child Safety and other services work as a team to make sure care of the children meets these standards. Child Safety and your kinship care support worker will regularly visit your home and talk with you and the children to see how this is going.

Sometimes relatives can be worried about what these standards mean, and what they have to do to meet them. For example, while you may understand that physical punishment is not to be used with the children, you may be unclear about what is seen as punishment that '*humiliates, frightens, or threatens them*'? This can also be different things for different children.

If you have a question or worry about any of these standards, write it down here to discuss with a worker. If you can think of examples of what you would do and what you would avoid doing to meet these standards, you can note these down for discussion too.

| STANDARDS OF CARE | QUESTIONS? WORRIES? EXAMPLES? |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. The child's dignity and rights will be respected at all times | |
| 2. The child's needs for physical care will be met, including adequate food, clothing and shelter | |
| 3. 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 | |
| 4. The child's needs relating to his or her culture and ethnic grouping will be met | |
| 5. The child's material needs relating to his or her schooling, physical and mental stimulation, recreation and general living will be met | |
| 6. The child will receive education, training or employment opportunities relevant to the child's age and ability | |
| 7. The child will receive positive guidance when necessary to help him or her to change inappropriate behaviour | |
| 8. The child will receive dental, medical and therapeutic services necessary to meet his or her needs | |
| 9. The child will be given the opportunity to participate in positive social and recreational activities appropriate to his or her developmental level and age | |
| 10. The child will be encouraged to maintain family and other significant personal relationships | |
| 11. If the child has a disability - the child will receive care and help appropriate to the child's special needs | |
| 12. 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. | |
| 13. If Child Safety has custody or guardianship of the child, the child's carer must act in accordance with reasonable directions. | |

Work alongside others in caring for the children

If you're approved to care for children related to you, you become part of a team of people who share responsibility for their care and supporting their families. Every member of the team is responsible for getting to know each other and learning how to work together for the children and their family. You may hear Child Safety and other workers call this team the children's **'safety and support network'**. Other members of this network usually include:

- the children themselves where possible — it's very important for children to have a say in what they need and want in their lives, what's important to them and what they want to happen
- the parents – even when other people are looking after their children, it's still important for them to have a say in what happens in their children's lives. Parents can usually still meet some of their children's needs, such as feeling loved and cared about and knowing they matter to their parents. Where it seems that children may be able to return home, it's essential that parents are helped to stay safely involved with their children's lives. Even if children cannot return home, it's important to the children's wellbeing that their parents remain involved with their lives, as much as is safely possible. It's the role of everyone in the safety and support network to plan for this and help make it happen
- other family members involved in meeting the children's needs
- workers from Child Safety who are responsible for the children
- your support worker from the local kinship care support service
- other workers, such as teachers, doctors or therapists may also be part of this network, depending on what help and care the children and their parents need.

Working alongside others means you need to talk together about the children, work out what they need, make decisions, plan and problem-solve together.

You'll need to share information you have about the children with other people and listen to the information they have. You'll probably have to attend meetings with different workers at their offices or in your home, help the children and their parents with visits together at home or elsewhere, and take the children to a few appointments. This can take a fair bit of time, energy and attention.

Sometimes, relatives caring for children can feel like they're not being listened to, or their opinion doesn't matter. It can be hard when you feel like you know a lot about the children's situation, feelings and wishes (because you're with the children every day and are part of their family) but workers or even other family members don't seem to recognise this. This situation can feel even trickier if your workers change, such as the children's Child Safety Officer or your kinship support worker and you need to establish new working relationships. Even though everyone in the safety and support network is focussed on what's best for the children, people can sometimes disagree about what this means and how to achieve it. It's useful to be aware these sorts of things can occur, so you can start to think through how to handle these circumstances.

Other relatives caring for children have said that sometimes it can feel hard to manage what's best for the children, while maintaining a positive relationship with their parents. We know that although it's possible to care for the children and still be there to help their parents, challenges can arise and sometimes you may end up feeling like you have to choose between them.

It's really important to lean on other people in your team in these circumstances, both family members and workers, to ask for their help in sorting this through. Both children and parents need support to keep their relationship with each other as strong as is safely possible, even if the children cannot return to live at home.

5. What decisions am I responsible for? What do I need to check with Child Safety or others?

Before you start caring for children related to you it's essential to know that planning and decision-making about their care, safety and wellbeing is shared by a number of people including you, their parents and Child Safety Officers.

You'll be part of a team planning for care of the children and support for their parents, and you'll learn about your role and what decisions need to be made. You'll receive copies of plans for the children detailing what decisions have been made and what action is needed and by whom, for example how visits will be arranged for the children and their parents.

When you're approved to provide children you are related to with care in your home, you have responsibility for their daily care. This usually includes decisions about things like:

- daily routines — meals, naptimes, homework, bath time, bedtime
- arrangements with children for keeping their rooms tidy, helping out around the house, receiving pocket money or spending time on computers and other devices
- daily transport arrangements for kindy, school or work and appointments
- clothing, grooming and hygiene
- whether children need to stay home sick from kindy, school or work
- play dates or visits with friends, social and recreational activities.

Responsibility for other decisions will depend on the level of Child Safety's involvement and what court orders are in place for the children. Sometimes, Child Safety will be authorised to make certain decisions about the children, while parents remain responsible for other decisions. Child Safety and your kinship care support worker will give you more detailed information about what the situation is when caring for children related to you, and why this is the case. Even if you're not authorised to make a particular decision, you may have information about the children or family that is relevant to the decision, so it's important to share that information with others within the children's safety and support network.

6. Who can help me and how?

Your Child Safety Officer and kinship care support worker are there to support you when providing care in your home for children related to you.

The role of the safety and support network is to support the children, their parents and the people looking after them. Over time, as you have contact with other members of this network, such as teachers, doctors, or therapists, you should find them to be a great source of help.

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC) is a non-government organisation to help foster and kinship carers by providing information, advice, training and guidance. QFKC have a team of trained specialist local Foster and Kinship Carers (FAST representatives) who volunteer to provide advice, support and advocacy services for approved carers. If a situation arises where you feel you haven't been included in decision-making for the children you care for, QFKC can assist you in talking about this with Child Safety.

Other families caring for children related to them have found it useful to meet and connect with other families doing the same thing. It can be very helpful to share stories with other people who may be facing the same challenges as your family. QFKC also host a range of activities where you'll have the opportunity to meet other kinship carers.

You can also look within your extended family for support in caring for the children. Some families take a 'family network' approach to the care of children, where a person or couple may be approved for caring (such as an aunty), while others (such as grandparents, or other aunts and uncles) also have a role to play in this.

Don't forget to draw on the help and support that your friends, neighbours and local community can offer. It can be useful to talk with your friends and neighbours about how they could help if the children come to live with you. Try and find out what services are available locally that might be useful to you and the children, such as libraries, community groups and activities, parks and recreational facilities, pools and sports centres.

Laura's story

Laura is aunty to two children — Tom, aged 14 and Shay, aged 7. They're her deceased brother's children and she's been approved by Child Safety to care for them. The children have lived with Laura and her sister Tracey for two years. The children's mother, Tara, is unable to care for them because of significant mental health issues and her use of illicit substances. Laura and her sister both work full-time and they share responsibility of caring for the children. Laura and Tracey's parents live a few streets away, and help out by doing something fun with the kids once a week, babysitting and taking them for sleepovers so Laura and Tracey can have a free evening now and again. They also help with driving the children to appointments and to visits with their mother, sometimes staying for a little while to spend time with the kids and their Mum together.

7. Is financial assistance available?

Yes — if you're approved by Child Safety to provide care in your home for children related to you, you'll receive a fortnightly allowance to help with the costs of caring for each child. This financial support is the same as that received by foster carers — there is no difference in the allowance. For some families, this financial assistance is critical to helping them care for the children. Even so, relatives can find it awkward or embarrassing to receive an allowance for doing what they see as their 'duty' by family or what 'I would do anyway'.

While these feelings are understandable, the reality is that caring for children related to you will bring extra costs for you and your household. Other families in this situation may tell you that the allowance doesn't cover all the costs you may incur, so you need to be prepared for this beforehand. You may also find that your finances are affected in ways you did not expect, for example, if you need to reduce your work hours so you can care for the children.

This allowance is paid in arrears each fortnight at different rates depending on the age of the children. If you live in certain designated remote or regional areas, where living costs are known to be more expensive, or where Child Safety believes the children you are to care for have higher needs for support, you may also receive additional assistance. The purpose of the fortnightly allowance is to help you meet the day-to-day costs of caring for the children, such as:

- food, clothing, household goods and personal care items
- costs associated with schooling, work and transport
- energy and utility costs (pro rata)
- toys, pocket money, social and recreational activities.

Depending on the assessed needs of the children you care for, you may be eligible for other special allowances to meet the children's particular needs, such as the High Support Needs Allowance or the Complex Support Needs Allowance, or other one-off payments for specific types of assistance. Please talk with your Child Safety Officer or support worker if you think these may be relevant for your situation.

It's important to know that the fortnightly allowance you receive is not income for providing care. This means you don't need to declare it in your tax return and it doesn't affect any Commonwealth Government benefits you may receive.

You may also be eligible for further payment, subsidy and service assistance from Centrelink related to child care, health care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Medicare.

Centrelink offers an advisory service especially for grandparents and other non-parent family members to explain what is available, if you are eligible and how to access it. Contact details for this service are on page 23 of this guide.

8. What other support is available for the children, their parents and our family?

CREATE Foundation

CREATE Foundation is a national organisation that connects and empowers young people living away from home in the care of others. They offer a range of programs, activities and advocacy for young people, including membership of a club.

Office of the Public Guardian Community Visitors

Community Visitors from the Office of the Public Guardian visit children being cared for by approved carers. They make sure that the concerns, views and wishes of children and young people are listened to and seriously considered. They can help children to see their family, talk to their Child Safety Officer, have a say in plans and decisions affecting their lives and connect children with help for legal matters.

Community Visitors are independent, which means they're not from any government department or community organisation. They are employed by the Office of the Public Guardian.

Family Inclusion Network

The Family Inclusion Network (FIN) is a network of parents and non-government organisations in Brisbane and Townsville who believe the voices of families matter. They facilitate opportunities for parents and relatives to be advocates for children and themselves on issues that affect their lives.

FIN brings together government agencies and representatives, parents and extended family members to work collaboratively on policies and issues that affect families.



Your next steps

The information in this guide will help you and the other members of your household to think about whether you can care for children related to you.

To help you make this decision, it's important that you:

- talk with everyone living in your home about how they feel about taking on this responsibility — what they think will work well, any worries they may have and ideas for addressing these
- talk with other members of your extended family and your close friends about how they could support your household to care for the children if you decide to proceed. How could they help, what challenges do they think may come up and what could they do to assist you and the children with these?
- talk to Child Safety or your kinship care service if you have any further questions or if you need more information at this point.

If you decide to proceed, the next step is to tell Child Safety. Your Child Safety Officer and your local kinship care service, will help steer you through the process from here.

Remember, it's okay if you decide not to proceed. If you feel that, for some reason, it wouldn't work to provide care in your home for children related to you,

then it's best for the children and your household to acknowledge that. Perhaps you could help the children in other ways, for example:

- taking the children out or having them come to stay with you for regular sleepovers so they maintain their relationship with you, their family, while also providing a break to those who care for them
- supporting the children with school, work, cultural connection or other activities
- transporting the children to visit their parents and siblings or being involved in the visits with the children and their family for support
- helping the children keep in touch with other family members (grandparents, cousins) and their cultural heritage and traditions.

As a family member who is concerned about the children, you can still remain an active part of their safety and support network without taking on their full-time care. If you think you could help the children in other ways, please talk to your Child Safety Officer or the kinship care service worker.

Contact details

Queensland Government – information for existing foster and kinship carers

Web: www.qld.gov.au/fosterkinshipcarers

Foster and Kinship Carer Support Line

Phone: 1300 729 309

Monday to Friday 5pm – 11.30pm,

Saturday and Sunday 7am – 11.30pm

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC)

Phone: (07) 3256 6166

Web: www.qfk.com.au/

Community Visitors, Office of the Public Guardian

Phone: 1300 653 187

Email: publicguardian@publicguardian.qld.gov.au

Web: www.publicguardian.qld.gov.au

Centrelink: Grandparent Advisers – this is an advisory service especially to help grandparents and other non-parent family members who provide ongoing care for children.

Phone: 1800 245 965

Web: www.servicesaustralia.gov.au

CREATE Foundation Queensland

Phone: Brisbane office (07) 3317 6020

Townsville office (07) 4767 7042

Web: www.create.org.au

Email: qld@create.org.au

Family Inclusion Network (FIN)

Brisbane: Phone: (07) 3013 6030

Web: www.finseq.org.au

Email: info@finseq.org.au

Townsville: Phone: 0402 354 984

Web: www.fin-qldtsv.org.au

Email: finqldtsv@gmail.com

Useful websites about caring, parenting and responding to the needs of children

Parentline – provides advice and counselling about any issue that affects you when in a parenting role. Call 1300 301 300 from 8am to 10pm, 7 days a week for the cost of a local call (mobile phone charges apply).

The Australian Childhood Foundation – provides free resources and information to help in caring for children traumatised by abuse and neglect.

Go to: www.childhood.org.au

The Raising Children Network – provides parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts. Go to: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

References

1. The information in this guide does not apply if you are caring for children related to you by family agreement or arrangement, without Child Safety being involved and having approved you to care; or where there is an order in place from the Family Court of Australia. If you are in these circumstances please contact Centrelink for information and financial assistance at: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/contact-us>
2. <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/protecting-children/responding-child-abuse>
3. <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/protecting-children/responding-child-abuse/care-agreements>
4. <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/protecting-children/responding-child-abuse/investigationassessment/assessment-orders>
<https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/protecting-children/ongoing-intervention/child-protection-order>



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Department of Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs
Locked Bag 3405, Brisbane QLD 4001

www.csyw.qld.gov.au

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