



**CHALLENGE**  
Community Services

**Foster Care**



## Foster Carer's Handbook

**WE'LL BE WITH YOU ALL THE WAY**

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N.B. The information provided in this booklet is current as of the 10/05/2023. Challenge reserves the right to have this information updated at any time.

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[www.challengecommunity.org.au](http://www.challengecommunity.org.au)

# Challenge Foster Care

As an authorised carer, you become part of the Challenge Foster Care team dedicated to supporting the children and young people in your care.

## What are the different types of foster care?

Carers can choose to take on children or young people under different types of care arrangements.

### Respite Care

Respite Care involves regular, time-limited care provided to a child or young person. For example, Respite Care could be for one weekend per fortnight or per month. Respite can be flexible and includes up to 24 nights of respite per year. This must be included and approved within the child or young person's case plan. Respite carers are asked to make a regular commitment to provide stability for the child or young person.

### Immediate Placement

Immediate Placement is when a child or young person is placed with a foster carer within four hours of the referral. There is no specific length of time a child can remain with the foster carer; however these types of placements can range from six weeks to six months or more.

There is often limited information available regarding the children and young people who require Immediate Placement.

### Short-Term Care or Restoration

When placed in Short-Term Care or Restoration, a child or young person is placed with a foster carer for a short period. This can be anywhere from several months to two years. The child or young person may be restored to their family, transitioned into guardianship care, adopted, or transitioned to a long-term foster care arrangement. Carers will be supported to work with the parents or potential guardian to support this process.

### Guardianship

Guardianship is where a child or young person is cared for by a person they already know, such as a family member or significant other. A Guardianship court order means the child or young person is no longer considered to be in foster care. When you become a guardian, you take on the parental rights and responsibilities for the child, until they are 18 years old. Guardianship carers are required to complete an annual report to the Department of Family and Community Services.

## Foster to Adopt

Foster to Adopt is when an individual, couple, or family adopts a child or young person who is in their care. Adoptive parents take on all legal rights and responsibilities for the child or young person. Fostering to Adopt provides a child or young person with a stable family while supporting the child or young person to maintain contact with their biological family.

## ITC Step-Down Care

This involves caring for a child or young person where they are transitioning from an Intensive Therapeutic Care service into a foster placement.

Carers who provide Intensive Therapeutic Step-Down Care have special authorisation for this level of care and undergo specific training to support them in this caring role.

## Permanent Care

Long-Term Care is where a child or young person remains part of your family with ongoing support from Challenge. The legal rights of the child or young person remain the responsibility of the Minister for Family and Community Services. Long-Term Care is required when restoration to family, guardianship, or adoption are not an option for the child or young person.

**RESPITE CARERS  
ARE ASKED TO  
MAKE A REGULAR  
COMMITMENT TO  
PROVIDE STABILITY  
FOR THE CHILD OR  
YOUNG PERSON.**



# Carer Requirements

As a carer you will need to provide a safe, nurturing, and stable family environment for the children and young people in your care.

## What does it take to become a carer?

In order to be a carer, you must be able to:

- Be committed to holding a meaningful role in a child or young person's life.
- Provide a safe and caring environment to a child or young person.
- Support children and young people to maintain regular contact with their family and significant others.
- Meet the day-to-day needs of the children or young people that are placed in your care.
- Demonstrate that you are a creative problem solver with listening skills, flexibility, and a sense of humour.
- Manage your family finances with the addition of another child or young person.
- Participate in assessments, reviews, meetings, networks, and training in your role as a carer.
- Work as part of a larger team.



## What suitability checks do carers and their households need to undergo?

When you apply to become a foster carer, Challenge Foster Care will undertake a Suitability Assessment. As part of this assessment, it is required that the following checks be conducted for any potential carers and household members over the age of 16. This includes anyone who resides on the property for more than 21 days per year. Challenge will undertake a Carer Review 60 days after initial placement of a child or young person and then every 12 months thereafter. Some additional checks are required every two years.

### Working with Children Check (WWCC)

A cleared Working with Children Check must be held at all times by all carers, potential carers, and household members over the age of 18. If a person moves into the house, onto the property or stays for more than 21 days in a year, Challenge must be notified in advance to ensure a Working with Children Check can be completed prior to the person moving in.

### National Police Check

As a carer for Challenge, you will be required to complete a National Police Check every five years. You must also notify Challenge if you become aware of any criminal charges against you or a household member. All household members aged over 16 will need to complete a National Police Check. If a person moves into the house, on to the property or stays for more than 21 days in a year, Challenge must be notified in advance to ensure a National Police Check can be completed prior to the person moving in.

### Community Services Check

In order to be authorised as a Foster Carer, Challenge will complete a Community Services Check for all potential carers and household members over the age of 16. If a person moves into the house or on to the property, or stays for more than 21 days within the year, Challenge must be notified in advance to ensure a Community Services Check can be completed prior to the person moving in.

### Other Agency Check

As part of the suitability assessment to become a carer, Challenge will need to make contact with any other agency where you have previously enquired about becoming a foster carer.

### 100-point Identification Check

You will need to provide 100-points of identification, such as Passport, Driver's License, Medicare Cards amongst others. This is required as part of Challenge's Suitability Assessment to become a carer and for the five-yearly National Police Check.

## Home Inspection

A Home Inspection will be completed as part of your suitability assessment to become a foster carer. A bedroom must be available for a child or young person in care, although this can be shared with a sibling where appropriate and approved by Challenge.

As an authorised foster carer for Challenge, a home inspection will be completed as part of your annual carer review or if you move to a new house. The Case Worker will also work with you to identify any potential hazards within the home environment as part of your monthly placement support.

## Pool Compliance

Where there is a pool or spa on the property, Challenge will require a Pool Compliance certificate. This must be completed prior to carer authorisation being granted or the placement of a child or young person in the house.

## Medical Checks

Challenge will require all potential carers to undergo a physical and mental health assessment to ensure there are no concerns which may impact on your suitability to be a carer for Challenge.

Where a potential carer has undergone fertility treatment within 12 months prior to their application, Challenge may cease the application process for a minimum of 12 months or until the potential carers have resolved the grief and loss to the standard required to meet the carer competency within their assessment.

Medical Checks will be conducted every five years, or sooner if required by Challenge. Carers who undergo assessment for Guardianship or Adoption will need additional health checks, as required for these application processes.



## What learning and development support is available to carers?

Challenge have a learning and development strategy to support our carers providing trauma-informed care. Challenge also provides training and support to assist carers in providing care which meets the specific needs of the child/children placed within your care.

### Carer Training

Prior to authorisation, potential carers will complete mandatory training in 'Shared Lives' and 'Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Behaviour' (SMART). These training modules provide potential carers with an overview of fostering and the out-of-home care system. They also provide an introduction to trauma, its impact on brain development, and related behaviour.

After authorisation, Challenge provides foster carers with regular training. This includes training in relation to providing care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; attachment and bonding; contact with significant others; and, challenging behaviours.

Challenge provides continued support to allow you to complete two compulsory training sessions per year through the provision of flexible training options and casework support. Ongoing learning and development is considered a requirement of being a carer for Challenge.

### Carer Assessment

All potential carers will undergo an assessment prior to being authorised as a foster carer for Challenge. The Carer Assessment will look at the elements of care and identify areas of strength and further development. This process will determine the potential carer's suitability and the recommended conditions of authorisation to support Challenge in matching children and young people to your family and circumstances. This assessment will be completed by a qualified and experienced carer assessor.

### Carer Reviews

Once you have become an authorised carer for Challenge, we will complete a Review within 60 days of your first placement and annually thereafter. Carer Reviews may also be undertaken where there is a change in carer circumstance or as requested by Challenge. On completion of a Carer Review, a plan may be created to address any areas of support or development that were identified during the Review.



## What policies or agreements will I be required to sign?

There are a number of documents you will need to sign in order to become an authorised carer. These are:

- The Code of Conduct for Authorised Foster, Relative and Kinship Carers
- The Charter of Rights for Children in Out-of-Home Care
- The Carer's Placement Agreement, which covers:
  - The role, responsibility, expectations, and rights of the Carer
  - Decision-making authority.

## What if I change my mind?

You have the right to withdraw your carer application at any time. Once you become a foster carer you need to advise Challenge in writing if you no longer wish to be authorised to provide care.

## How does the placement process work?

The NSW Family and Community Services of Family and Community Services (Community Services) are responsible for intervening in child protection matters.

When a child or young person is in need of care and protection through foster care, Challenge receives a referral for the placement of a child or young person where there is availability of carers and these carers are suited to the requirements of the child entering care.

Once the referral is received, Challenge will complete a comprehensive placement assessment. You will be provided information in relation to the immediate needs of the child or young person. You will also have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may arise for you and your household before you accept the placement.

In some circumstances, children and young people will require Immediate Placement and little information will be available at time of placement in these instances.

Once a child or young person is placed with you, the Challenge Caseworker will provide ongoing support to you and the child or young person in your care.

**MORE SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE, OR BY CONTACTING CHALLENGE COMMUNITY SERVICES BY PHONE.**

# Carer Supports

As a foster carer, you can access both financial and personal support to assist you in your caring duties.

## What financial supports are available?

To help with the costs of being a foster carer, financial support is available dependent on the number of children in your care, the level of their needs, and the type of care you provide.

### Standard Foster Care:

- Low Package:  
\$656.46 per fortnight
- Medium Package:  
\$1029.28 per fortnight

### Respite Care:

- Low package:  
\$84.58 per night
- Medium Package:  
\$104.67 per night

In general, applicants who wish to provide care should have adequate financial resources to support one full-time carer at home after placement. This allows for the development of a relationship between carer and child.

Applicants may be employed full or part-time if they are able to provide adequate time to the child or young person in their care. For example, it may be possible to work part-time and still care for a school-aged child, but this may not be possible if the child has particular needs or is very young.

A foster care allowance is paid to carers to cover most of the additional costs of caring for a child or young person. Carers are encouraged to obtain home and content insurance. Any damage caused by a child or young person in the care of Challenge should be covered by the carer's insurance or carer allowance.

## What am I expected to pay for as a carer?

Foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance to meet the day-to-day expenses associated with caring for a child or young person.

### Expenses to be covered by a foster carer include:

- Clothing
- Footwear
- Basic medical needs including medication
- Toiletries
- Recreational activities
- School camps
- Sporting activities
- Education costs
- Uniforms
- Textbooks
- School excursions
- General medical needs and dental needs
- Pre-school fees
- Food

Any additional funding requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must be approved within the child or young person's case plan.



### Other financial assistance available

You may be eligible for financial assistance through the Australia Government. For the range of supports available, visit the Department of Human Services website:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au>.

## Home Visits and Case Planning

Challenge carers work in partnership with Case Workers, communicating regularly about a child or young person's ongoing needs and any concerns. Challenge Case Workers will conduct a home visit on a monthly basis, at minimum, as well as provide regular phone and email support as required. Carers are invited to attend case conferences and regular case plan reviews. There may be additional meetings required, such as for the development of a Positive Behaviour Support Plan; participation in carer reviews; and, health and education meetings.

## Behaviour Management

Carers are expected to work closely with Challenge to develop appropriate behaviour management strategies for children and young people in their care. Carers are not allowed to use any physical force to discipline foster children and carers must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical punishments, such as smacking.

It is very important that children's behaviour is addressed in a way which does not re-traumatise nor gives the message that they are not cared for. Research has shown that hitting or other physical punishments are not effective in dealing with children who have experienced trauma. Challenge has a behaviour management policy which guides carers on how they can address behaviour and we offer training in relation to challenging behaviour.

## Family Contact

Family contact will be dependent on the goal of the child or young person's case plan, well as any specific Court Orders or agreements. Carers may be expected to transport children and young people to and from contact as well as supervising contact where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Caseworkers will provide support and training to carers to assist carers in fulfilling this role, where required. There may be times where transport and/or supervision is facilitated by the Case Worker or another authorised person. This is determined on a case-by-case basis.

## Respite Care

Respite care is provided on a case-by-case basis and should be discussed as part of the child or young person's case plan. Respite provides an opportunity for carers to have a break and provide a positive experience for the child or young person. Respite is provided by authorised Challenge carers and the Caseworker will work with everyone involved.

# Carer Rights and Responsibilities



As a carer for Challenge, you have a number of rights and responsibilities. In your role, Challenge will support you to uphold the rights of the children and young people in your care, and their family. You can also expect to have your rights respected and upheld, along with the rights of your family.

## What are my rights as a carer?

It is your right, as a carer for Challenge, to:

- Be provided with information about a child or young person to help you to make a decision whether or not to accept a placement.
- Participate in decision-making processes in relation to a child or young person within your care.
- Make certain decisions about the day-to-day care of a child or young person within your care.
- Receive information about support services that you can access as part of your carer role.
- Access learning and development resources to assist you in your caring role.
- Register a complaint.
- Be informed of decisions Challenge may make along with any other information that may have an impact on the care of the child or young person.
- Access information which is kept on file which relates to your caring role (for example your carer assessment and authorisation).
- To have certain decisions reviewed.

## What are my responsibilities as a carer?

As a carer for Challenge, it is your responsibility to:

- Inform Challenge if you have or suspect you may have a bar or interim bar on your Working with Children Check.
- Inform Challenge if you know or suspect that anyone who has regular contact with a child or young person in your care has a bar or interim bar on their Working with Children Check. This includes any household members or regular visitors.
- Report to Challenge any offences against children or young people which occurred outside of NSW in which you, a household member, or a frequent visitor were involved or were alleged to have been involved.
- Report any changes in your circumstances which may affect your carer authorisation or require a carer review.
- Inform Challenge of anyone who is intending to reside within your home or on your property for more than 21 days.
- Not allow anyone to reside within your home or on your property who has not had their Working with Children Check verified by Challenge.
- Keep information about the children and young people in your care confidential.
- Work within the Carer Code of Conduct and Placement Agreement.
- Uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



*AS A CARER FOR CHALLENGE,  
YOU WILL BE SUPPORTED IN  
UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF  
THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE, THEIR FAMILY.  
AS A CARER FOR  
CHALLENGE YOU CAN EXPECT  
TO HAVE YOUR RIGHTS AS  
WELL AS THE RIGHTS OF  
YOUR FAMILY RESPECTED AND  
UPHELD.*

# Allegations of Abuse and Reportable Conduct

Challenge Community Services takes all allegations of abuse seriously and follows due process in relation to the investigation of abuse allegations.

## What happens when an allegation of abuse is made?

In the event an allegation of abuse is made, Challenge is required to report ~~to~~ a number of external bodies including the NSW Family and Community Services, the Office of the Children's Guardian, and possibly the NSW Police. Challenge will also notify the NSW Ombudsman of 'reportable conduct' matters. These are allegations which relate to:

- any sexual offence, or sexual misconduct, committed against, with, or in the presence of a child (including a child pornography offence or an offence involving child abuse material);
- any assault, ill-treatment, or neglect of a child; or,
- any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child, whether or not the child consents, regardless of the circumstances.

## What happens when an allegation of abuse is investigated?

If an allegation of abuse is made which meets 'reportable conduct' criteria, this will be investigated by an independent investigator. In these instances, as a carer you will be provided with:

- Notification that there has been an allegation;
- Details of the allegation and an opportunity to respond;
- The opportunity to have a support person present during an interview; and,
- Details of the finding and support in meeting any recommendations that are made.

Challenge will make an assessment as to whether it is appropriate for alternative care arrangements to be made whilst the investigation occurs. The safety, welfare, and wellbeing of all parties involved in the allegation is considered as part of this process.

## Support provided to carers during an investigation

Investigations can be an extremely stressful time for every person involved. Challenge encourages and supports carers to utilise the Relationships Australia counselling service during an investigation. Challenge can also refer carers to their local Connecting Carer's Coordinator for guidance and support during this process. Challenge also offer a free counselling services under EAP.

# Complaints and Feedback

Challenge wants to ensure that an efficient, fair, and accessible mechanism exists for dealing with complaints and feedback.

## How do I lodge an internal complaint or feedback?

Those who register a complaint are protected from any repercussions, reprisals, or victimisation as a result of making a complaint. Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved directly with the staff or manager of the service concerned.

## Lodging a Complaint

Complaints may be logged with Challenge in the following ways:

- On the Challenge Website via 'Your Feedback' in the Contact Us menu or visit [www.challengecommunity.org.au/contact-us/your-feedback/](http://www.challengecommunity.org.au/contact-us/your-feedback/)
- In person
- By telephone on 1300 058 113
- By letter at PO Box 487 Tamworth, NSW 2340

Challenge is responsible for dealing with complaints from the public concerning Challenge's affairs. Challenge Practice & Quality Division is responsible for dealing with complaints and feedback.

## Timeframe for Response

Challenge is committed to responding to complaints in the following timeframes:

- Your complaint will be acknowledged within three working days of receipt. For complaints made in person, this will usually occur at the time the complaint is lodged. Where complaints are lodged in writing, a manager will contact the complainant to discuss their concerns.
- Investigations and internal review will usually be conducted within 10 working days of receipt of a complaint or request for a review. Where this is not possible, complainants will be kept fully informed of their matter's progress.



## Confidentiality

Staff involved in complaints handling are required to treat all information as confidential. The name/s of complainants or any other identifying information will only be provided to staff involved in managing the complaint and may be provided to staff identified as a respondent to a complaint.

## NSW Ombudsman

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can take your complaint to the NSW Ombudsman <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au> or on 1800 451 524.

## Reviewable decisions

As a carer for Challenge Community Services you have the right to participate in decision making processes and have your views heard and acknowledged. There may be times where Challenge will need to make a decision that you may not agree with. In these circumstances, you may request an internal review be conducted. In some circumstances, if you are unsatisfied with the decision of the internal review, you may take the matter to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT).

## NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT)

[www.ncat.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ncat.nsw.gov.au)

1300 006 228

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Do children or young people in my care have to go to respite?**

Challenge can offer flexible respite options on a case-by-case basis, and as part of the child or young person's case plan and permanency goal. There may be times where Challenge will place a child or young person on respite, in circumstances where Challenge believes such action is: in the best interests of the child or young person; required to support the placement; or, as part of a risk assessment.

## **Will I continue to receive an allowance when my child is in respite?**

Carer payments usually continue unchanged for weekend respite; however, this is determined on a case-by-case basis. Where respite is required for longer than a weekend period, the carer allowance will not be paid.

## **What happens if there is a change in my circumstance after I become a carer?**

If your circumstances change, tell your Case Worker as soon as possible. In some circumstances, a carer review will be undertaken. Challenge may be able to provide you with support, where required.

## **What if I want to move to a new house while I have a child or young person in my care?**

Prior to a child or young person moving into a new home, Challenge will need to complete a home inspection, and obtain a pool compliance certificate if there is a pool or spa on the premise.

## **What happens if I want to move interstate whilst caring for a child or young person?**

Challenge will assist in supporting a move. Where the move includes a child in care, Challenge will support and facilitate case management transfer of the child or young person, if it is seen to be in their best interests and is supported by Community Services.

## **What information will parents be given in relation to carers?**

Challenge promotes the exchange of information to the child or young person's family as a

way of building relationships and supporting the development of personal and cultural identity for children and young people. As part of this process, Challenge will consult with you in relation to the information that will be released to family members, and a risk assessment will be completed prior to any information being exchanged.

### **What training will I be expected to undertake?**

Challenge recognises the importance of continued learning and development for our carers and staff. Challenge require specific training modules to be completed prior to and after becoming an authorised carer. Challenge carers are expected to participate in a minimum of two learning and development sessions per year.

To support carers in their learning and development, Challenge provides access to Foster Carer Online Training Australia (FCOTA) free of charge. Carers are also supported by their Case Workers through the provision of resources and materials to support them in meeting the changing needs of the children and young people in their care.

### **Can friends or family members provide care for the child or young person?**

Respite with friends and family members is supported on a case-by-case basis as part of the child or young person's case plan. Challenge will require certain checks and assessments to be undertaken as part of the approval process. Where care arrangements will be on a regular basis, family members or friends may need to be authorised as regular respite carers for the child or young person.

### **Are there limits on the number of children I can care for?**

The number of children Challenge will place with a carer is assessed on a case-by-case basis. For example, a child with special needs will require a much higher level of care. If you would like to increase the number of children in your care, you will need to discuss this with your Case Worker. In circumstances where Challenge supports a potential increase to your authorisation, a re-assessment will occur to determine your capacity to meet the needs of any additional child whilst not compromising the quality of care being received by the children or young people already in placement with you.

### **What supports can you offer carers for a child from an Aboriginal background?**

Aboriginal children have a cultural support plan developed by their Case Worker, in consultation with family, kin, and community members. Resources and training are made available to carers to promote positive and meaningful connections to Aboriginal culture for the child or young person. However, the priority is that Aboriginal children will be supported by an Aboriginal organisation and placed with Aboriginal carers.

## What supports can you offer carers for a child from a CALD background?

When a child or young person requires a cultural support plan, their Case Worker will consult with their family, as well as other key stakeholders, to develop a plan that supports the child or young person's cultural needs.

## Need support?

If you have any further questions, or need assistance with your child, don't hesitate to contact us. We're here for you every step of the way.

**For support and information, contact Challenge Community Services on 1800 084 954 or [enquire now](#).**

