

# Preparing & Adjusting To Your New Role

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners

## Purpose:

**Children entering care often bring experiences of stress, loss, disrupted relationships, and environments that may have felt unpredictable or unsafe. These experiences shape how they interpret adult behaviour, transitions, routines, and correction. Practitioners need a clear, shared framework to support carers in responding with steadiness and attunement.**

## Trauma Informed Care

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Children's behaviour is shaped by their nervous system, with fear and overwhelm often driving escalation, withdrawal or resistance. Attachment history influences how children relate to carers, including how much they trust, test or avoid closeness. Predictable routines, calm tone and consistent boundaries help create emotional safety. Children regulate best through safe relationships, not punishment.



### Practitioner Guidance:

Practitioners use this lens to guide carers toward curiosity rather than judgement, connection rather than control, and steady, predictable caregiving as the foundation of healing.

It's important to help carers understand behaviour as communication rather than misbehaviour and encourage carers to have predictable routines, calm responses and emotional presence.

When you support carers to recognise attachment patterns and respond with empathy, you are coaching them to use co-regulation before correction.



### Reflection Questions:

- What might this behaviour be telling us about the child's sense of safety right now?
- How is the child's attachment history shaping their response to this carer?
- How is the carer's tone, pace or emotional state affecting the child's regulation?

### Relevant Statement of Standards:

Standards a, c, g, h, i

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## Opening Your Home

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

This module is grounded in Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978), Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011) and trauma-informed care (van der Kolk, 2014; Perry, 2006). These frameworks recognise that children's behaviour reflects nervous system states shaped by early relationships and stress. Predictability, attunement and relational repair support felt safety and the rebuilding of trust after disruption and loss.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Support carers by normalising mixed emotions and explaining how children test safety through behaviour. Using trauma-informed language, you can coach carers to slow interactions, prioritise co-regulation and respond with warmth and predictability. Mistakes are reframed as opportunities for repair, reinforcing that connection, not perfection,

### Reflection Questions:

- What feelings have been coming up as you prepare for a child to join your home?
- How do you usually recognise in your body when you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed?
- What helps you return to calm?
- What do you hope a child feels when they first enter your home?

## Preparing The Home

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

This section is grounded in trauma-informed care, sensory processing theory and neurodevelopmental models of stress (Perry, 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). Children who have experienced trauma often have heightened sensory sensitivity and reduced felt safety. Calm, predictable environments support nervous system regulation, reduce hyperarousal, and help children interpret their surroundings as safe rather than threatening.

### Practitioner Guidance:

You can support carers to translate theory into practical action by focusing on safety, predictability and sensory awareness. This includes guiding carers to reduce clutter, soften lighting, manage noise, and provide clear routines. Encourage small, safe choices for children to restore autonomy, reinforcing that environmental cues are powerful tools.

### Reflection Questions:

- What do you want a child to feel when they walk into your home?
- Are there spaces that might feel overwhelming or overstimulating?
- What choices can you safely offer the child in their first days here?
- What parts of your current routine support calmness? What might need adjusting?

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## Preparing Carers

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Carers' nervous systems play a central role in trauma-informed care, drawing on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and neurobiology (Porges, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). A regulated carer provides relational safety, models co-regulation, and supports the child's nervous system. Connection and attunement are more therapeutic than correction, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, reflection, and consistent presence.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Support carers to notice their own stress signals and use regulation strategies such as breathing, grounding, and pausing, and access support networks. You can help carers build the capacity to remain steady, respond relationally, and provide a safe, supportive environment for children.

### Reflection Questions:

- What helps you regulate when you feel overloaded?
- When things become overwhelming, what is most grounding for your family?
- Who are the people you can call for emotional and practical support?
- How will you protect your own rest or recovery time?

## Biological Children & Reporting

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

This work draws on attachment theory, family systems theory and trauma-informed practice, recognising that all children in a household are affected by change and stress (Bowlby, 1969; Minuchin, 1974; Porges, 2011). Biological children and children in care respond through their nervous systems. Safe, emotionally attuned adults support disclosure, regulation and family stability. Clear reporting pathways protect children while preserving relational safety and trust.

### Practitioner Guidance:

It's important for carers to balance the needs of all children while meeting their legal and relational responsibilities. This includes normalising emotions, protecting one-to-one time, and maintaining clear family boundaries. Practitioners also coach carers to respond calmly to disclosures, follow mandatory reporting requirements, document concerns, and seek agency support, reinforcing that safety and connection go hand in hand.

### Reflection Questions:

- What helps your children feel secure and connected when things feel different?
- How confident do you feel about responding calmly if a child discloses something worrying?

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### References

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- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). (2020). Foster and kinship care: A review of current policy and practice. Melbourne: AIFS.
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### ♥ Self-Care Reminder for Practitioners

Working with families in trauma and crisis is deeply meaningful — and it also asks a lot of your nervous system.

Boundaries are not about distancing yourself from families; they are about protecting your capacity to stay present, compassionate and effective over time. When you hold clear limits, you make it possible to keep showing up with steadiness rather than exhaustion.

#### 🧑 Remember:

- You are not responsible for fixing everything — you are responsible for showing up with professionalism and compassion.
- Strong boundaries model healthy relationships for carers and families.
- Seeking supervision or support is a strength, not a failure.

#### 📌 Support Options:

- Internal reflective supervision
- Peer consultation groups
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Trauma-informed counsellors or wellbeing coaches

🌱 You do your best work when you are supported, rested and emotionally resourced. Making space for your own wellbeing isn't an extra — it is a core part of ethical, sustainable practice



# Sexual Development, Boundaries & Consent

## A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners

### Purpose:

This practitioner tool is designed to support foster and kinship carer practitioners in engaging carers with deeper understanding, reflection, and application of knowledge related to sexual development, boundaries, consent, and online safety. It is aligned with trauma-informed care principles and the Statement of Standards (Child Protection Act 1999, QLD), promoting safe, respectful, and developmentally appropriate care.




## Understanding Sexual Development

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Sexual development is a lifelong process influenced by biology, trauma, culture, identity, and individual experience (Hackett, 2014). Children in care may display sexual behaviours that are shaped by disrupted attachments, early exposure to inappropriate material, or experiences of harm.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Support carers to understand the difference between developmentally typical behaviours and those that are concerning or harmful. Use frameworks such as the Traffic Light Tool (True Relationships & Reproductive Health, 2023) to assess and respond.

-  Green: Age-appropriate, mutual, and spontaneous behaviours
-  Orange: May be concerning; requires monitoring, education, and support
-  Red: Coercive, aggressive, secretive, or developmentally inappropriate; requires immediate intervention

### Reflection Questions:

- How do you currently support carers to distinguish between age-appropriate and concerning sexual behaviours?
- How might cultural background, disability, or trauma history influence a child's sexual development?
- How confident are your carers in responding calmly and without shame to a child's curiosity or behaviour?

### Relevant Statement of Standards:

Standards 2, 3, 4, 5, 8



# Sexual Development, Boundaries & Consent

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## Boundaries Within the Home

### **Theory and Practice Knowledge:**

Children with histories of trauma often struggle with boundaries due to disrupted attachment and inconsistent caregiving. Ecological and attachment theories emphasise the importance of safe, structured environments where rules are predictable and developmentally appropriate (Barter & Berridge, 2011; Bowlby, 1988). Boundaries teach children that their bodies and privacy are respected.

### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Explore how carers communicate boundaries about privacy, nudity, and physical contact. Promote co-creation of house expectations with children and use strategies that support learning, such as visual aids and social stories. Avoid punitive or shaming responses when boundaries are breached.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- How do carers teach and model respectful touch and personal space?
- What happens when children with different trauma histories live in the same household?
- Are boundaries inclusive of neurodivergent or culturally diverse expressions of privacy?

## Open Conversations & Reducing Shame

### **Theory and Practice Knowledge:**

Shame is a known barrier to disclosure and can reinforce secrecy or risk-taking (Wamser-Nanney & Campbell, 2020).

Trauma-informed approaches emphasise safety, empowerment, and connection. Language is a powerful tool for shaping a child's self-worth and understanding of their body.

### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Support carers to become comfortable with open, age-appropriate language. Encourage ongoing rather than one-off conversations. Help carers reflect on how their own upbringing may influence their comfort with these topics.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- How does the carer respond to behaviours like self-touch or curiosity about periods or erections?
- Are questions met with praise and curiosity or discomfort and avoidance?
- What scripts or examples can be offered to reduce shame in everyday moments?

# Sexual Development, Boundaries & Consent

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## Online Safety & Technology

### **Theory and Practice Knowledge:**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the growing influence of digital environments.

For children in care, technology can be both empowering and dangerous. Children who have been sexually harmed may be more vulnerable to grooming, sextortion, and exposure to adult content (Hollis & Belton, 2023).

### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Equip carers with resources and confidence to talk openly about online risks. Promote a balance between supervision, education, and trust-building. Support carers to include children in setting digital rules that evolve with age and development.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- What systems are in place for monitoring, checking privacy settings, or reporting issues?
- How do carers respond when children disclose online harm?
- Are children encouraged to share their online experiences without fear of punishment?

## Open Conversations & Reducing Shame

### **Theory and Practice Knowledge:**

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) requires careful, non-punitive, evidence-informed responses.

Letourneau et al. (2017) and Hackett (2014) advocate for early intervention, therapeutic responses, and avoiding labelling children. The Traffic Light Framework and the Layered Continuum support practitioners in guiding carers through risk assessment and support planning.

### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Guide carers to document objectively, stay calm, and avoid shame-based responses. Create a support plan involving therapeutic services, family support workers, and specialist resources such as Bravehearts' Turning Corners program. Reinforce that carers are not alone in responding to complex behaviours.


### **Reflection Questions:**

- Do carers feel confident identifying red, orange, or green behaviours?
- How do they manage their own emotional response?
- What safety plans are in place for multi-child households?

# Sexual Development, Boundaries & Consent

## A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners

### Specialist Resources & Further Reading:

- Bravehearts:  
<https://bravehearts.org.au>
- ThinkUKnow:  
<https://www.thinkuknow.org.au>
- ACCCE: <https://www.accce.gov.au>
- eSafety Commissioner:  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au>
- QLD Child Safety Practice Manual:  
<https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au>
-  Recommended Reading:
- Hackett, S. (2014). Children and Young People with Harmful Sexual Behaviours
- Bromfield & Paton (2024). Layered Continuum
- Letourneau, E. (2017). Evidence-Based HSB Interventions
- Wamser-Nanney, S. (2020). Shame and Sexual Behaviour in Trauma-Affected Children
- Barter & Berridge (2011). Peer Violence and Marginalisation in Residential Care
- Hollis & Belton (2023). Technology-Assisted Sexual Harm in Vulnerable Youth

### Self-Care Reminder for Practitioners


Supporting carers and children around sensitive topics such as sexual development and harmful sexual behaviour can be emotionally demanding. It is important to regularly check in with your own wellbeing and recognise when you may need to pause, reflect, or access support.

### Remember:

- You are not alone.
- Complex practice requires a team approach.
- It is okay to feel challenged—these are sensitive topics.
- Reflective supervision is a space to process, grow, and seek guidance.
- Professional boundaries and emotional safety are part of ethical practice.

### Support Options:

- Internal reflective supervision
- Peer consultation groups
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Trauma-informed counsellors or wellbeing coaches

 You can only support others when you are resourced yourself. Make space for your wellbeing—it is an essential part of your practice.

