

Working within a system

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Carers

Why this resource?

Caring for a child within the child protection system means working alongside many people, services, and decisions. This can feel confusing, overwhelming, or unclear at times, especially when carers are already managing the day-to-day needs of a child.

This resource exists to help carers understand the system around them, know who does what, and recognise what support is available.

Roles & Responsibilities of the Care Team

You – The Carer

- Provides daily care, safety, routines, and connection
- Observes behaviour and raises concerns
- Advocates for the child and communicates with the team
- Cannot change contact, case plans, or major medical decisions

Child Safety Officer (CSO)

- Plans for the child's safety, health, education, culture, and contact
- Coordinates schools, health, and services
- Contact for safety concerns, approvals, and case plan questions
- Cannot approve major decisions alone, respond instantly, or provide emotional support

Senior Child Safety Officer / Team Leader (SCSO/TL)

- Oversees the case and approves major decisions
- Contact if urgent, escalating, or CSO is unavailable
- Not for day-to-day matters

Foster & Kinship Care Practitioner (Agency Worker)

- Supports carers emotionally and practically
- Helps with behaviour support, funding, paperwork, and advocacy
- First contact if you feel overwhelmed or need guidance
- Cannot approve statutory or contact decisions

Child Safety Support Officer (CSSO)

- Helps with contact visits, transport, and practical support
- Contact for issues during family contact or transport needs
- Cannot make decisions, change contact, or approve expenses

Community Visitor (CV)

- Independent person who checks the child's rights and wellbeing
- Contact if the child needs independent support or advocacy
- Cannot change plans or support carers directly

Meetings & Home Visits:

You'll usually experience:

- Regular home visits from your support worker and the child's caseworker
- Case plan reviews every six months
- Education support planning (usually once a year)
- Community Visitor conversations with the child
- Contact arrangements with family

Meetings should feel respectful and collaborative. You can ask:

- "What is today's meeting about?"
- "Can you explain that in a simpler way?"
- "What are the next steps?"



Working within a system


Continued...



What support can look like:

Emotional Support


- *Someone to talk to when behaviours escalate or you feel overwhelmed.*
- *Regular check-ins from your support worker.*
- *Peer groups or yarning circles with other carers who "get it."*

 *Try: "Am I feeling calm, anxious, or stretched thin today?"*

- *"What emotions are coming up for me in this placement?"*
- *"Have I noticed myself reacting strongly to small things? What might that be telling me?"*

Practical Support


- *Help with transport to appointments or family contact.*
- *Sourcing clothing, school items, baby gear, or therapeutic toys.*
- *Assistance with referrals for speech therapy, counselling, or developmental assessments.*

 *Try: "Are routines running smoothly, or are there gaps that need support?"*

- *"Do I have enough time and energy for appointments or activities?"*
- *"Is there something I'm forgetting to plan for that would make life easier?"*


Training & Learning

- *Workshops or one-on-one sessions on trauma, behaviour, relationships, or attachment.*
- *Guidance on responding to big emotions and supporting regulation.*

 *Try: "Do I understand why the child is acting this way?"*

- *"Are there strategies I want to try but need guidance on?"*
- *"Do I need training to feel confident in managing certain behaviours?"*

Communicating your needs

-  *Try: "I'm noticing he's struggling after contact—can we chat about extra support?"*
- *"I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed. Can we organise a check-in?"*
- *"I need clarity on who to call for what."*

Use the communication style that's easiest for you - email, text, phone, or face-to-face.

Decision Making, Rights & Finances

What Child Protection Decides:

- Medical treatment
- School changes or enrolments
- Travel outside certain areas
- Contact arrangements
- Long-term planning

What You Decide:

- Daily routines
- Meals, clothing, hygiene, activities
- Emotional support strategies
- Routines that help the child feel safe and connected

If you're unsure whether something can be reimbursed, ask your agency practitioner first. You are not alone. Support is there to help you provide safe, stable care. Asking for help is a strength. Clear communication matters, and your voice is important in decisions.