

# Working within a system

## A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners

### Purpose:

This practitioner tool supports foster and kinship carer practitioners to engage carers in understanding the child protection system, their role within it, and the supports available to them. It encourages reflection, clear communication, and practical application of knowledge related to roles, decision-making, meetings, and seeking support. The tool aligns with the Statement of Standards (Child Protection Act 1999, QLD) and promotes safe, stable, and collaborative care for children.

## Understanding Working in a System

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Working in a system equips practitioners to navigate the QLD child protection system alongside carers using systems-informed, trauma-responsive, and strengths-based practice. It emphasises role clarity, understanding carer needs, supporting carers to communicate and participate confidently in decisions, and using reflection to build consistent, transparent relationships that prioritise both child safety and carer wellbeing.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Working within the child protection system can be overwhelming for practitioners and carers, especially when practices differ across service centres. Supporting carers to navigate this complexity is essential. Acknowledging discomfort, reinforcing the value of the carer role, and clearly holding boundaries helps create safety and clarity.

Calm, respectful communication supports carers to raise concerns with confidence, while reflective support includes helping carers manage family dynamics, recognise personal limits, and seek debriefing or additional support to reduce pressure and build confidence.

### Reflection Questions:

- How am I supporting carer understanding of roles, boundaries, and decisions, and where might confusion still be causing stress?
- What signs of emotional load or fatigue am I noticing, and how am I responding to build safety and trust?
- How am I reinforcing strengths and normalising help-seeking when carers feel unsure or overwhelmed?
- How am I adapting my communication and support to match this carer's needs and preferences right now?

### Relevant Statement of Standards:

Standards a, e, f, i, k



# Working within a system

## A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners



### Key Roles & Responsibilities

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

Carers are part of a wider care team, with each role carrying specific responsibilities within the system. Clear role explanations, consistent communication, and validation support carers' sense of safety and confidence, which in turn strengthens collaboration, reduces stress, and supports more stable placements.

#### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Clear explanations of roles help carers understand responsibilities, boundaries, and who to contact, reducing confusion and stress. Using simple language builds confidence and supports effective communication. It is also important to check in with carers' understanding, as this is a large amount of information that may need to be revisited over time.

#### **Reflection Questions:**

- Which roles feel clear to you? Which feel confusing?
- How do you prefer to receive communication from care team?

### Meetings & Home Visits

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

Meetings are most effective when they are collaborative, predictable, and respectful. Clear structure, transparent processes, and regular emotional check-ins support carers' sense of safety and capacity to engage, strengthening shared decision-making and practice outcomes.

#### **Practitioner Guidance:**

Begin with connection by checking in with the carer using open, non-judgemental questions. Notice and acknowledge emotional load through language, tone, and body cues. Use consistent, predictable meeting structures in familiar spaces, and communicate with calm, validating language. Reinforce strengths by naming what is working, observe system pressures impacting the carer, and use reflection to identify pain points, support gaps, and practical steps that reduce overwhelm and build trust.

#### **Reflection Questions:**

- Was anything unclear in the last visit?
- What would help you feel more confident in meetings?
- How can I best support you in meetings?

# Working Within a System

A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners



## Support for Carers

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Support works best when it is ongoing and proactive, not only offered in crisis. Drawing on systems and attachment-informed practice, consistent emotional, practical, learning, and financial support strengthens carer safety, resilience, and placement stability. Normalising help-seeking through reassurance and validation reduces shame, supports regulation, and eases pressure within placements.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Offer regular check-ins and proactive emotional, practical, and learning support, while normalising early help-seeking as part of sustainable care. Matching support to carers' preferred communication styles, identifying and coordinating responses to gaps in support, and watching for early signs of stress or fatigue all help reduce pressure on placements. Using strength-based language and support carers to confidently articulate their needs.

### Reflection Questions:

- What stops you from asking for help?
- How does it feel when you reach out?
- What could make it easier for you to seek support next time?

## Communicating your Needs

### Theory and Practice Knowledge:

Carers may experience anxiety, feeling unheard, or a lack of safety when communicating their needs, particularly within complex systems. Drawing on strengths-based practice, encouraging assertive communication and offering multiple avenues for contact supports relational safety, builds confidence, and strengthens effective partnership working.

### Practitioner Guidance:

Provide clear language options for raising concerns and encourage them to choose communication methods that feel most accessible and comfortable. Offer support with written communication, as some carers may find this challenging. Summarise meeting discussions actions helps ensure clarity and shared understanding. Validating carers' observations reinforces their expertise, builds confidence, and supports their role as key contributors to decision-making within the care team.

### Reflection Questions:

- What's the best way for me to communicate when you're feeling stressed?
- Do you understand next steps from our meeting/ recent discussion?

# Working within a system

## A Guide for Foster & Kinship Care Practitioners

### Decision Making, Rights & Finances

#### Practitioner Guidance:

- Clarify delegated authority and boundaries
- Guide carers on approvals for medical, educational, contact, and travel matters.
- Support carers in navigating funding requests and reimbursements.

#### Reflection Questions:


- Do you understand which decisions are yours and which require approval?
- How confident do you feel with requesting funding or reimbursements.

### Self-Care Reminder for Practitioners

Self-care in this work isn't an add-on — it's part of safe, sustainable practice.

Working alongside carers and families in the child protection system can be emotionally demanding and, at times, overwhelming. Looking after yourself helps you show up with clarity, calm, and consistency.

- Build regular moments for reflection and debrief, not just crisis support
- Notice your limits and name them early
- Use supervision as a space for learning and support, not performance
- Prioritise boundaries between work and home
- Seek connection with colleagues — this work isn't meant to be done alone

 You're best able to support others when you feel supported and resourced yourself.

Making space for your own wellbeing isn't optional — it's a vital part of safe, sustainable practice.

#### Support Options:

- Team debriefs following complex or emotionally heavy work
- Clear guidance around roles, responsibilities, and decision-making pathways
- Access to training and professional development
- Peer connection and shared learning

