

Significant persons practice guidance

OFFICIAL

Introduction

A child's right to remain connected to people who matter to them is enshrined in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and it is embedded in the *Children, Youth and Family Act, 2005* (CYFA) and the [Charter for children in out-of-home care](#) (the Charter). The Charter outlines the obligation to ensure every child and young person in care 'keeps in contact with family, friends and people and places that matter to them'.

Evidence shows that future health, wellbeing and lifespan is directly related to meaningful belonging and connection. Children and young people experience belonging by being a part of an enduring network of peers and significant persons who value and care about them.

Children and young people in care have a right to feel they belong and be protected from further unnecessary loss of relationships that are central to their identity, belonging and safety. Prioritise and urgently act to foster and sustain the child's relationships with significant persons in line with their best interests.

Definition

A significant person is any safe adult other than the child's parent who has, or could, care about the child; or who the child has a felt sense of connection to. These may be adults who are in the child's life currently or previously; or they may be adults who the child has not had the opportunity to meet (such as an extended family member) but there is opportunity for an enduring relationship to be created. Significant persons may include, but are not limited to:

- Extended family, kith or kin
- Previous caregivers
- Elders or members of the child's cultural community
- Neighbours or a friends' parents.
- A significant person will need to be subject to an assessment to determine the safety of their contact with the child.

Belonging is a key practice consideration

Focus practice on sustaining a child's belonging as part of searching for suitable placement options. The child's belonging must always be the starting place. From there consider placement options.

Relational permanence is the experience of having positive, loving and nurturing relationships sustained. Significant persons are pivotal to a child's relational permanence. It is important to:

- work from a position of searching for relationships rather than simply 'placement options' when exploring the child's network. Explore, search and capture *all* past, present and possible future relationships.

OFFICIAL

- remember that a person may not be able to care for the child but may be willing to sustain connection with them and play a role in their life.
- sustain relationships between the child and previous carers. Support relational repair if the child's placement ended. Previous carers will commonly be significant persons to the child even if they no longer live with them.
- broaden the lens about who is included in the child's relational network and how contact and connection is supported to happen.

Search, find and arrange connection to significant persons

The assessment will be informed by SAFER children framework, information gathering, validation and analysis, and will be based on a judgement of what is in the best interests of the child. Use creativity and persistence to actively map, track down, enable and nurture the child's relationships with significant persons. Prioritise knowing the child's relational history. Map the family's and child's past and present ecosystems to search out relationships. This includes where they have lived (and who they remember from those locations), from school, groups they've been involved in, friendships they have had, and their community connections over time and across locations and identity. Also explore and seek out cultural or familial contacts that they have not yet had the opportunity to connect with.

Trace possible significant persons from case files which often have rich, (but often untapped) leads from the child, or family's distant past. Seek the input of the child, family, extended kin and kith network, cultural community and professionals you are already in touch with. Engage in ongoing conversations, storytelling, use books or visual cards, visual mapping, play and toys, art or other creative approaches. Remember to pace your exploration and adapt approaches in response to the child's needs and preferences; and prioritise cultural safety.

Some practice ideas which may assist include:

- Use of the [My Views booklets](#) to explore with the child.
- Drawing on the [kinship engagement teams'](#) report which may reveal rich information about important adults.
- Use of cultural consultation and the [cultural planning](#) process meaningfully.

Inviting significant persons together to collaborate, seek commitment about their role and how their involvement will support the child to experience lifelong belonging.

These practice ideas have been drawn from the Child Protection Manual. There are many valuable external resources available that we encourage you to explore.

To receive this document in another format, email the OPP Directorate
<oppdirector@dfh.vic.gov.au>.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, December 2025.

Available at Home | Child Protection Manual | CP Manual Victoria

<<https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au>>