

Contact

Information for contact supervisors

This sheet provides information for workers and other adults supervising contact for children and young people in out-of-home care. Out-of-home care includes foster care, residential care and kinship care (being looked after by a relative or a family friend).

What is contact?

Contact, sometimes called 'access', is any contact a child has with parents, other family or friends other than their carer while they are in care.

Contact is primarily about the child's needs and rights. It helps children and young people stay in touch with their family and other people important to them. Contact is also a way to meet parents' rights to maintain connection with their children while they are not living at home. Sometimes contact is about working toward a child or young person's return to the care of their parents or guardians. Contact may be included in the conditions of an order from the Children's Court or may be part of the case plan for the child or young person.

Contact includes supervised and unsupervised visits at various places, overnight stays, telephone calls, letters, cards and emails.

Why is contact supervised?

In some situations, supervision of contact is ordered by the Children's Court or specified in the case plan.

Supervision of contact aims to ensure the child or young person's safety and provide them with support so that contact can happen in a calm, safe and positive way.

Contact arrangements for each child will be determined by their needs, their family situation, the Children's Court order and the case plan.

Parents or other people attending contact may not always agree with the contact arrangements. They should be asked to discuss their concerns with the case worker. Family members should be treated with respect and courtesy even if agreement is not possible.

Contact can be stressful for children and young people. This might not be immediately apparent but can affect the child or young person's behaviour later. It is important that contact is managed so that stress and anxiety is minimised.

To reduce anxiety and the risk of harmful impacts for children and young people, contact should be well planned, with everyone sticking to the plan so there are no surprises. Each person with a role in contact should be clear about the plan and their responsibilities.

Planning for contact includes deciding about:

- who has contact, how often and what type of contact each person has
- practical arrangements (venue, times, transport, equipment, financial matters etc.)
- the level and form of supervision (from 'line-of-sight' supervision to intermittent monitoring)
- what to do if there are concerns (such as, if a person is affected by drugs or alcohol)
- contact telephone numbers
- what will happen if contact can't happen as planned.

Who can participate in contact?

Regardless of whether contact is supervised or unsupervised, only people who have been included in an order to have contact by the Children's Court or approved by Child Protection can have contact with a child or young person while they are in care. You should be clear about who has been approved to participate in contact you are supervising.

What should I do if a parent wants someone else to attend their contact?

Prior to any person being permitted to have contact with the child or young person, an assessment of the person by the department is needed. The person will need to undergo safety checks by Child Protection, sometimes including a police check.

You are not able to decide whether a person can have contact. This is a case planning decision for Child Protection.

If someone comes to contact who has not been approved to have contact with the child or young person, they must not be allowed to participate in the contact. This is the case even if the person is known to you or has previously met the child or young person.

You should inform the person whose contact it is (the parent or other family member) that you are not able to agree to any other person attending the contact because they are not approved for contact at this time. You should alert the case worker as soon as possible so they can follow-up.

You should seek assistance immediately if there are difficulties.

If any person is not satisfied about contact arrangements, they should be asked to speak with the case worker or the case worker's manager. At all times, the best interests of the child or young person remain the primary concern.

The case worker is:

Phone:

The case worker's manager is:

Phone: