

Frequently asked questions – SSI Multicultural Foster Care

What is foster care?

Foster care offers children a home while their own family is unable to provide them with a safe or caring home environment.

Children in foster care are aged from 0 to 18 years (up to 21 years in Victoria).

Depending on their circumstances, a child may be in foster care for a few days, a few weeks or for many years. Sometimes they may remain permanently in the care of foster carers.

In NSW, there are about 20,000 children not able to live with their birth parents. In Victoria, this number is over 11,000. Of these, about 15% are from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Why do children need foster care?

Many children who need foster care have experienced trauma and various forms of abuse and can't continue to live with their birth family.

Wherever possible, the intention is to get children back living safely with their birth families. Foster care is required when there isn't extended family members or other suitable people to provide for their care.

When a child has been separated from their family because of ongoing child protection concerns, the Children's Court and the relevant state government department are involved in making the decisions about children's care.

Why is it important to help children maintain a connection to their culture?

Children in care who are supported to maintain a connection to their culture, religion and language have better outcomes as they grow up. These connections help children to develop their sense of belonging and identity.

Settlement Services International (SSI) Multicultural Foster Care provides foster carers and casework support for all children, with a strong focus on children from CALD backgrounds.

Helping children stay connected can also help if and when children are returned to their birth parents and community.

Who can be a foster carer?

Anyone can apply to become a foster carer so long as they are:

- Over 21 years of age
- An Australian citizen or permanent resident or a New Zealand citizen living in Australia
- In good physical and emotional health

You can be:

- Single, married or in a de facto relationship (including same-sex couples)
- In a rental property or in your own home
- Working or not employed

What does it take to be a foster carer?

The important qualities of a foster carer include the ability to:

- Make a commitment to being a significant person in a child's life
- Provide a safe, loving and caring home environment
- Respect the culture and religion of the child and their biological family
- Be willing to learn and understand the impact of trauma on a child
- Be patient, flexible, creative, a problem solver and a good listener
- Have a sense of humour
- Balance your family's needs with the needs of the child
- Manage your family's finances with the addition of another child
- Maintain your other interests and family supports
- Participate in meetings and training
- Work as part of a larger team

What to expect as a foster carer

Being unique and different is part of what makes every one of us special. Every child and their birth family is different. Foster carers make a significant contribution by caring for vulnerable children in need of care and stability.

Some children may show signs of stress, worry and uncertainty. Some may seem quiet, others may seem troublesome.

Child abuse causes trauma and harms how a child's brain and emotions develop and how they learn to behave and react to situations.

Some children may show their anxiety, fear and confusion by not wanting to be a part of a family and withdrawing. Others may show behaviour that could be described as difficult or challenging such as talking back, being angry, not listening, not eating or sleeping, not being able to regulate their emotions, throwing tantrums or running away.

Some children have never had routine in their lives and will need extra amounts of love, understanding and patience to help them learn new ways of behaving.

The longer a child has not had stability and emotional support, the more time they will need to accept a different way of being cared for.

What types of foster care are there?

There are four main types of foster care:

- **Respite care** is regular periodic care. Children are looked after for short periods of time to provide birth parents or foster carers with a break, for example over school holidays or weekends.

- **Emergency or crisis care** is required when there is immediate concern for a child's safety. The duration can be from one night to a few weeks.
- **Short-term care** is required when there is a possibility that the situation that caused a child to be removed from their birth family may be resolved and they will be able to return.
- **Long-term or permanent care** refers to a situation where the child is not expected to return to their birth family or other suitable carer. This type of care is provided until the child turns 18.

Will there be direct contact with the child's biological parents?

Maintaining or rebuilding relationships between children and their biological parents, siblings and family is continued when it is safe for the child.

Many parents struggle to understand their roles when they are not caring for their children and this can raise many emotions including anger, loss, confusion and hope.

How carers talk about children's biological parents will influence how a child sees their family.

It is important that visits are safe, helpful and a good experience. It is also beneficial for children to see their carers have contact with their birth family. It gives them positive messages about people's ability to communicate despite the situation

What does the assessment process involve?

- All adults in the household will have to complete a Health Check, Working With Children Check, Police Check and referee checks
- One on one discussion
- Participating in training (Shared Lives) which covers nine topics and usually takes about 20 hours in total, either on weekends or evening sessions, in person or online
- A series of one on one interviews at your home to focus on your interests, skills, strengths and ability to take on the foster care role.

What support is provided?

SSI MFC works closely with foster carers to ensure they have the support they need.

A range of support services are available including:

- A professional caseworker; bilingual if required
- Regular home visits
- 24 hour on-call support for crisis situations
- Initial and ongoing training
- Language specific peer support groups
- Respite care
- Financial support:

Your state government through the relevant department allocates an allowance to each child depending on their foster care needs.

The allowance is paid fortnightly to meet the day to day expenses in caring for a child or young person. It is intended to cover such things as general clothing and shoes, food, basic medical needs, preschool, or school and recreational activities.

For NSW carers, please refer to the [DCJ website](#). For Victorian carers, please refer to the [DHHS website](#).

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