Practice learnings and resources, Fostering Lifelong Connections: *Carer Coaching*

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Funded by the Australian Research Council LP180101332





We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

Tree of Knowledge - pokerwork on kangaroo skin, Lynette Riley, 2010 http://Sydney.edu.au/kinship-module



Coaching carers to develop relationships with family

- Coaching is a practice approach that can be applied to work collaboratively towards a range of goals, including relationshipbuilding.
- Carers, in particular, may need support to achieve goals relating to building long lasting connections with parents and a child's extended family and to work through any relationship challenges.



Case Study: Leslie

Background: Leslie has been a foster carer for two decades. For the last 6 years, she's been caring for siblings now aged 10 and 12. Leslie holds very negative attitudes towards the children's parents.

Casework support: The caseworker has been actively trying to bring Leslie's attention to the impact of her views on the children, pointing out the negative language Leslie uses and the way her tone of voice changes when speaking about the parents. Initially Leslie became very defensive and felt the caseworker was taking the parent's side. The caseworker felt defeated but reflected on how to change her messaging. At the next home visit, when the carer criticised the parents, the caseworker gently pointed out that the children could hear and might internalise the criticisms. This was a lightbulb moment for the carer who now tries to speak more positively about the parents.

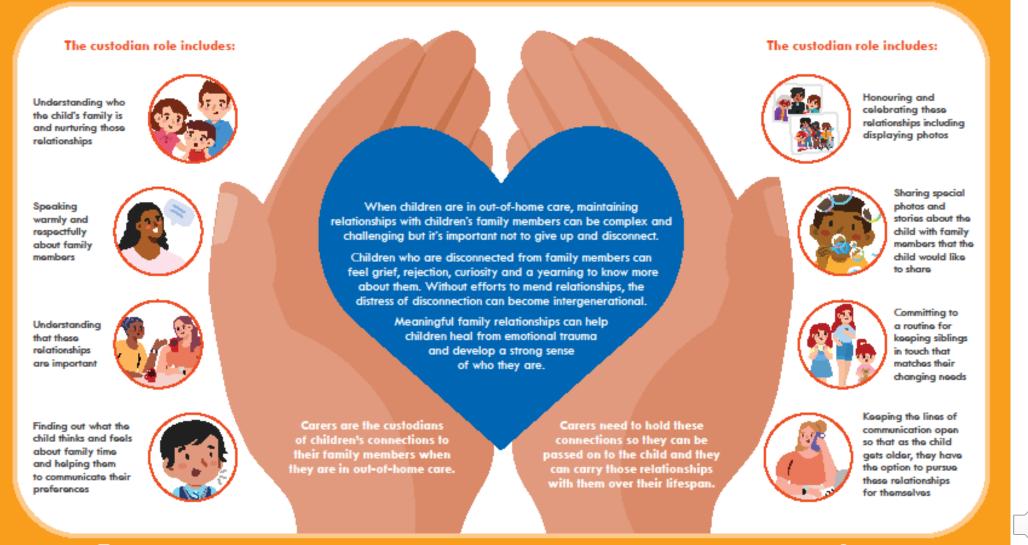


Practice Learnings

Help carer understand parent's story; encourage empathy, non-judgement "Keeping a positive slant"	Carer can help the child develop a better understanding of parents, with sensitivity and respect for them
Recognise what's impacting them – i.e., mental health, disability	Carer can understand context and not take issues (e.g., reliability) personally
Process frustration and come up with alternatives if visits are cancelled last minute	Carer can model flexibility with child, explain reasons and deal with feelings of rejection
Bring back to the child's experiences	Carer can recognise and maximise the good things for the child
Delve into assumptions and whether these are based on past and may have changed	Carers can move beyond dynamics in the past and be receptive to change; can be a particular issue with kin carers
Encourage attention to positive interactions during visits	Carer can observe what is going well and adjust their standards and expectations
'Celebrate little wins" "Listen and validate"	"Challenge "This stuff takes" dominant stories"

Carers as Custodians of Children's Connections

Safe and meaningful connections with birth family



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Reflective exercise

- Think of a carer who is challenged by family time.
- Thinking about the strategies that have been discussed, which strategies could you use?
- Is there a strategy that you have used before that was not mentioned here?
- How could you use the *Carers as Custodians of Children's Connections* resource to prompt conversation with the carer?



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