



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

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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>



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# 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 relationship-building.
- 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 dominant stories"**

**"This stuff takes time"**





# Carers as Custodians of Children's Connections

Safe and meaningful connections with birth family

## The custodian role includes:

Understanding who the child's family is and nurturing those relationships



Speaking warmly and respectfully about family members



Understanding that these relationships are important



Finding out what the child thinks and feels about family time and helping them to communicate their preferences



When children are in out-of-home care, maintaining relationships with children's family members can be complex and challenging but it's important not to give up and disconnect.

Children who are disconnected from family members can feel grief, rejection, curiosity and a yearning to know more about them. Without efforts to mend relationships, the distress of disconnection can become intergenerational.

Meaningful family relationships can help children heal from emotional trauma and develop a strong sense of who they are.

Carers are the custodians of children's connections to their family members when they are in out-of-home care.

Carers need to hold these connections so they can be passed on to the child and they can carry those relationships with them over their lifespan.

## The custodian role includes:

Honouring and celebrating these relationships including displaying photos



Sharing special photos and stories about the child with family members that the child would like to share



Committing to a routine for keeping siblings in touch that matches their changing needs



Keeping the lines of communication open so that as the child gets older, they have the option to pursue these relationships for themselves



## 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?



**Research Centre for Children and Families**  
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Website:

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html>

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Fostering Lifelong Connections Website: <https://rccf-fostering-connections.sydney.edu.au/>

