



CREATE Position Paper

Issue: Sibling Placement and Contact in Out-of-Home Care

CREATE’s Position

CREATE believes that siblings in out-of-home care, wherever possible, must be supported to stay together; and where co-placement is not possible, they must be enabled to maintain regular contact with each other whilst in care. Sibling contact should be included in individual case planning and the frequency and method of contact (e.g., face-to-face, phone, mail/email etc.), should be directed by each individual child (as age appropriate) or young person in care, unless there is particular risk of harm.

CREATE urges state and territory governments to prioritise and monitor the implementation of the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care (FaHCSIA, 2011), particularly Standard 9, and others that impact the provision of contact between children and young people in care and their siblings.

National Standards	Measures
1. Children and young people will be provided with stability and security during their time in care.	1.3 The proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care who report feeling safe and secure in their placement.
2. Children and young people participate in decisions that have impact on their lives.	2.1 The proportion of children and young people who report that they have opportunities to have a say in relation to decisions that have impact on their lives and that they feel listened to.
9. Children and young people are supported to safely and appropriately maintain connection with family, be they birth parents, siblings or other family members.	9.1 The proportion of children and young people in out – of-home care who are placed with relatives and kin.
	9.2 The proportion of children and young people who report they have an existing connection with at least one family member which they expect to maintain.
	9.3 The proportion of children (as age appropriate) and young people who report having contact with family members, by the reported frequency of contact, by their reported satisfaction with contact arrangements.
10. Children and young people in care are supported to develop their identity, safely and appropriately, through contact with their families, friends, culture, spiritual sources and communities and have their life history recorded as they grow up.	10.1 The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have a current cultural support plan.
	10.2 The proportion of children (as age-appropriate) and young people who demonstrate having a sense of connection with the community in which they live.
11. Children and young people in care are supported to safely and appropriately identify and stay in touch, with at least one other person who cares about their future, who they can turn to for support and advice.	11.1 The proportion of children and young people who are able to nominate at least one significant adult who cares about them and who they believe they will be able to depend upon throughout their childhood or young adulthood.

Evidence

- Children and young people in care contact their siblings more frequently than any other family members (McDowall, 2013).
- Children and young people in care desired more frequent contact with their siblings, than with any other family members with whom they were not living (McDowall, 2013).
- Children and young people that are co-placed in care generally experience more placement stability and successful reunifications (Webster, Shlonsky, Shaw, & Brookhart, 2005).
- Children placed in intact sibling groups experienced more stability and fewer disruptions in care than those who were separated (Drapeau, Simard, Beaudry, & Charbonneau, 2000; Leathers, 2005)
- Nurturing sibling bonds while in care can reduce the impact of some of the negative occurrences while in care, and provide valuable support well into adulthood (Herrick & Piccus, 2005).
- Family and culture, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, play a pivotal role in the child's development (Moss, 2009).

Actions

CREATE has compiled a national report into sibling placement and contact in out-of-home care (McDowall, 2014) that shows it is essential for governments to better accommodate the needs of siblings in care, including ensuring co-placement whenever possible (i.e., where harm is not a concern), and regular ongoing contact between siblings when co-placement is not possible.

In addition CREATE has developed information resources aimed at caseworkers, carers, and siblings in out-of-home care expressing the same messages and encouraging the active participation of all stakeholders. The resources outline the benefits for children and young people if siblings are enabled to stay together in care. Research tells us that when siblings stay together, children and young people:

- are happier;
- have more self-esteem;
- achieve better at school;
- have better relationships with their siblings.;
- form stronger bonds with their foster family and experience more stable placements; and
- are more likely to be reunited with their birth family.

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