



# Sibling Connection

A Practice Guide  
for Caseworkers  
and Carers



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## Acknowledgement of Country

CREATE Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land where we live and work and their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community. CREATE would like to pay respect to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse culture and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

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- The young people who shared their time and expertise to inform the practice guide; and
- The carers and caseworkers who supported children and young people to participate.

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## 1. Overview

This Sibling Connection Practice Guide seeks to offer practical suggestions and guidance for caseworkers and carers who are involved in supporting children and young people in the out-of-home-care system in South Australia. This guidance includes how to maintain and promote positive connections and relationships for children and young people with their siblings, while also offering strategies for supporting their connections to culture, family and community. This guide will encourage caseworkers and carers to work together with children and young people in ways that will emphasise their choices and voices, through the implementation of innovative, flexible and solution focused strategies. This will lead to healthy, positive relationships for children and young people in care with their siblings.

This practice guide aims to build awareness and knowledge of the importance of sibling connection and provide strategies to initiate, support and maintain connection. These include:

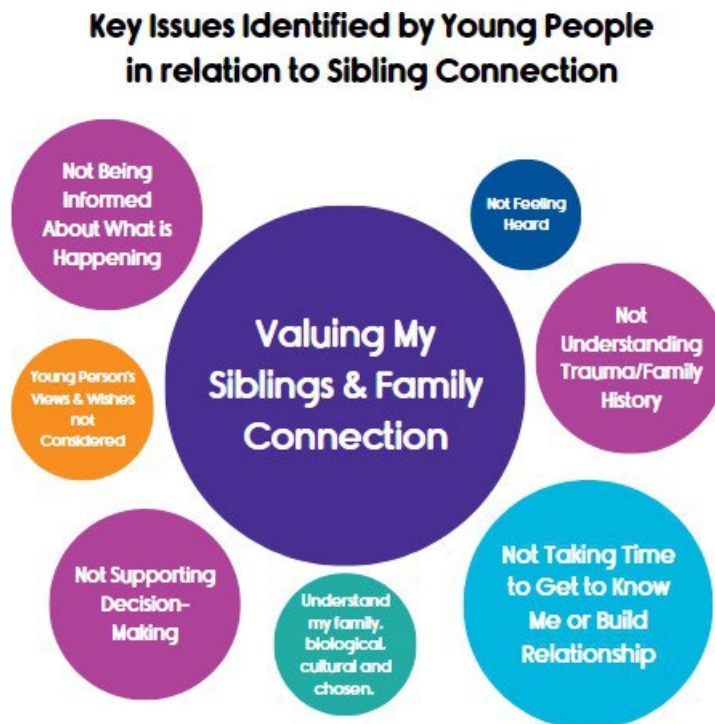
- Engaging with children and young people in relation to their sibling connection.
- How to support connection time as a carer and as a caseworker.
- How to initiate sibling contact, including with a cultural sensitivity lens via engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations.
- How to support and maintain contact for young people and their siblings.
- Planning and decision making.

A state-wide consultation approach was taken to develop this guide, where children and young people with a care experience were invited to participate in individual and group sessions to share their insights and feedback on sibling relationships. The study is based on a limited cohort of 30 young people, which is a non-representative sample of the care population. In developing this Practice Guide, CREATE has ensured that the guidance directly reflects those voices accessed through the consultation. It should also be noted that, although this guide includes perspectives from Aboriginal young people, for true cultural safety and cultural capability, an additional guide should be developed in partnership with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation (ATSICCO) that includes specific cultural advice.

It is CREATE's recommendation that a separate Sibling Connection Guide be co-designed and co-developed with a South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, the Department for Child Protection South Australia, and with CREATE's support as needed.

## 2. Framework

Throughout the design process, young people identified many issues associated with sibling connection during their time in-out-of-home care. The strongest themes emerging for young people in relation to contact with their siblings are outlined below:

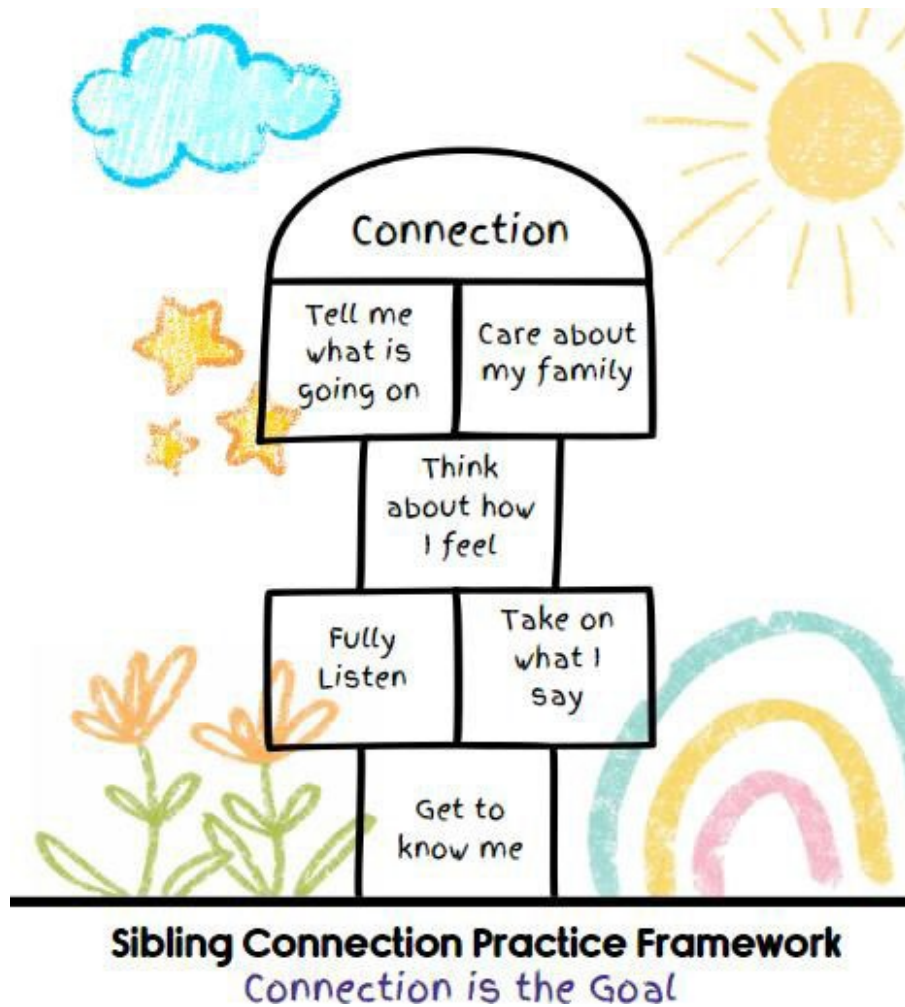


Specifically, young people were worried that caseworkers and carers do not know enough about their family or history to be able to facilitate a meaningful, effective connection. Underpinning this, is a strong sentiment of distrust of department staff in relation to prioritising their connection with their siblings and families. Young people valued safe contact with families and wanted their views and preferences to be embedded in practice.

The goal of the Sibling Connection Practice Guide and Framework is to build better, stronger and supportive relationships between siblings and family. This will lead to a deeper connection between biological, cultural and chosen family. As a foundation, this framework needs to be built on mutual trust, safety and understanding, followed by an intentional effort from caseworkers and carers to genuinely know the young person, their history and their family. The following model exemplifies what young people have described to CREATE in 6 steps:

1. Get to know me
2. Fully Listen
3. Take on what I say
4. Think about how I feel
5. Tell me what is going on
6. Care about my family

These steps have been modelled against a Hopscotch image to represent how each step leads into the next. Due to the individual nature of each young person's circumstances and relationships, some steps may be easier to accomplish and so may be "hopped" over.



The following section will show how to implement each of these steps in practice, while understanding them and reflecting on important considerations for moving forward. As you step through the sections there will be opportunities to reflect on practice and consider new strategies. Before you commence this very important journey, it is helpful to reflect on what sibling connection looks and feels like for young people living in the care system.

Reflective activities

**Podcast listen:** [What does sibling connection look like in the system Part 1](#)

**Podcast listen:** [What does sibling connection look like in the system Part 2](#)



### 3. Framework in practice

#### 3.1 Get to know me

##### What we know

Robust, safe and equitable child protection work is reliant on the relationship between caseworkers, carers and young people (Cossar et al. 2016). Specifically, young people consistently report that they want to be seen as an individual person:

*“Unless you had workers that would advocate for you, it made things hard. I saved my own money to be able to do things with my siblings and sometimes there would be so much going on in the unit and we would get distracted and then not feel like asking for something or just forgetting.”*

(Young person)

Getting to know a young person within the child protection context can be difficult, especially when there are complex factors to consider, including complex needs of the young person and family, family dynamics, cultural implications, trauma history and developmental challenges (Holden et al., 2020). As caseworkers and carers, building initial rapport, trust and demonstrating genuine care for a young person and their family, particularly their siblings, drastically changes the experience of young people in care (Petrocci et al., 2018; Jobe et al., 2013).

Further, young people consistently report that without having a caseworker or carer who genuinely knows and cares about them, they are unlikely to share thoughts and feelings about situations. This means that those who want to support the young person may be unaware of the young person's concerns, feelings and circumstances (Cossar et al., 2016; Jobe et al., 2013; Holden et al., 2020). This is especially important in relation to contact with siblings, as young people have expressed a range of feelings, anxieties, hopes and fears regarding connection with their siblings:

*“Siblings often provide a sense of continuity and emotional support, helping each other navigate the complexities of being in care.”* (Carer, metro)

Young people have strong feelings about connection, or lack of connection, with their families. It is important that as a first step in considering sibling and family connection, young people are encouraged to participate in the decision making, planning and implementation of connection time.

Young people have shared with CREATE their concerns for not being included in the decision making and planning for connection time with their sibling/s. Young people want their caseworkers and carers to listen to them about building their relationships with their siblings and supporting them through organising family time and maintaining their connections. To illustrate an example of young people feeling listened to and heard, one young person told CREATE:

*“When I asked to see my siblings, that they [caseworkers] actually listened”* (Young person SA)

To illustrate examples of young people not feeling listened to or heard, young people told CREATE:

*“Caseworkers organise it with carers and don't ask the YP”* (Young person)

*“I've asked my caseworker multiple times to see my siblings and they haven't organised it”* (Young person)

### Things to consider

Children and young people are more likely to engage when they feel safe and see that their carer or caseworker is consistently trying to connect with them. Carers and caseworkers should consider the following strategies:

### Building rapport

Establishing a meaningful connection with children in care is essential for their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Some ways that this can be achieved include:

- Take the time to get to know the child or young person on an individual level. Ask them about their interests, hobbies and favourite things.
- Show genuine care and concern for the child's wellbeing. This can be demonstrated through actions such as checking in regularly, providing emotional support, and advocating for them.
- Consider the differing sibling experiences and memories for the child living in care. Some children may have taken on a protective role or have loyalties to a particular sibling or a parent.
- Respect their boundaries and give them space if needed, but also let them know that you are there for them whenever they need someone to talk to.
- Acknowledge and validate their experiences, even if you may not fully understand or agree with them.
- Be consistent and reliable in your interactions with the child or young person, as this can help build a sense of stability and security for them.

### Conversation starters

Effective conversation starters are crucial tools for carers looking to build rapport and trust with children and young people in their care. Some ideas may include:

- “Can you tell me something that you really like to do?”
- “Are there any foods that you love to eat?”
- “What are some of your hobbies?”
- “Do you need any supplies (art, gear) for your hobbies?”
- “What are some fun things you like to do on the weekend?”
- “What is your favourite part of your day?”

### Reflective activity



Podcast listen: [Get to know me and ways you can do that](#)



**Reflective journaling: Siblings and family are very important for children and young people living in care and they may think about them frequently.** Carers should reflect on what is working well and what isn't working well. What could be improved and what steps could be taken to support contact and visits for the child/young person and sibling/s?

**Carers should consider if they have:**

- Helped the young person contact their siblings.
- Supported the young person to send birthday cards or gifts outside of family contact times.
- Started planning for the next sibling visit.



### 3.2 Fully listen

#### What we know

Through CREATE's consultations, it is clear that young people have different relationships with their siblings and these relationships can change over time. It is also known that many young people long for their siblings and suffer deeply when contact is not possible. Some also lack the support to build the relationships while other young people feel unsafe around their siblings.

*"In my opinion, being with siblings is more than just love." (Young Person, CREATE's Voices in Action Conference, 2024)*

Children and young people consistently report feeling unheard or that no one is listening to them in relation to their requests for contact with their siblings. Young people in out-of-home care can feel powerless and often report not experiencing a felt sense of safety (Weger et al., 2014). This drastically impacts on how young people experience caseworkers, carers and other professionals involved in their care (Weger et al., 2014). For a young person to feel heard in these situations, the practitioner must utilise a specialised skillset of active listening, respectful communication and emotional validation (Weger et al., 2014). When these skills are implemented effectively, young people have an increased sense of felt safety, trust and are more willing to be involved in decisions or discussions that affect them (Weger et al., 2014).

Primarily, active listening involves three distinct stages:

1. Utilising predominantly non-verbal 'soft skills', that include attending behavior (i.e. eye-contact and body language), questioning, responding, reflecting, observing, focusing and influencing.
2. Reflecting or repeating back the key messages from the other person.
3. Asking questions that expand on the points made by the other person.

When embracing these steps in active listening, caseworkers will be able to develop trust with young people they work with, to better understand them and understand how they feel (Rodat, 2020). Also, through these efforts in building a relationship with the child or young person, caseworkers may gain insights into any preferences and fears (Rodat, 2020). When children and young people are listened to like this, they feel validated and empowered:

*"Sometimes the resi workers ask how visits went, [I] find that helpful. Sometimes I would like to be left alone, and allow myself to come talk when I am ready." (Young person)*

*"[I feel validated] When caseworkers listen to my needs." (Young person)*

Further, when young people feel heard and understood, they are more likely to share their experiences and feelings, assisting caseworkers in knowing what types, methods and frequency of sibling contact would align with the child's views and wishes:

*"They organise things that are boring... because they don't listen to what I do like." (Young person)*

It is critical to implement practices like active listening with genuine curiosity and commitment to understand and respect the child or young person's experience. Young people know when communication strategies are disingenuous and this can damage the relationship (Holden et al., 2020):

*"Workers try to relate to me by saying 'I know exactly what you mean and what you're going through' when they don't have kids, never been in care, and never been able to not see their siblings." (Young person)*

## Things to consider

### *Active listening*

Active listening is the practice of fully listening to the other person when they are speaking (University of Adelaide, 2018). To engage in active listening in relation to a young person's family, the following should be engaged (Holden et al., 2020):

- Non-verbal skills (including microskills)
  - Facial expressions
    - Maintain neutral, open expression to avoid making the young person feel judged and use facial expressions to convey empathy and understanding.
  - Body language
    - Positive body language like facing the young person and nodding encourages sharing, while closed-off body language (such as crossing arms, or facing away from the young person) can hinder communication.
  - Silence
    - Allow silence to give the young person time to reflect. This indicates that you are not rushing the conversation. Practice waiting at least 5 seconds after asking a question.
  - Proximity
    - Respect personal space to avoid discomfort. The appropriate distance will depend on cultural norms and individual preferences.
  - Eye contact
    - Eye contact shows engagement but should be adapted based on cultural norms, trauma history and individual comfort levels.
  - Other considerations
    - Consider how factors like gender, race and height may affect communication, and take steps to mitigate them to create an effective dialogue. Mitigation of these issues is important (e.g. sit down instead of standing if you are tall) and seek support from others if the communication is not effective due to these factors (e.g. men speaking to young women about women's business).
- Reflect or repeat back the key messages from the other person
  - Reflective statements
    - Summarise and repeat back what the young person says to ensure understanding. This will show active engagement.
  - Empathic responses
    - Demonstrate a genuine understanding and compassion to build trust and rapport without offering solutions. Use phrases that validate their feelings.
- Questions that expand on the points made by the other person
  - Closed questions
    - Closed questions require a short answer and often begin with words like "do," "did," or "have." For example, "Did you see your sister on the weekend?". Closed questions should be used sparingly, as they can limit the conversation and prevent the young person from sharing their thoughts and feelings.
  - Open questions
    - Open questions often commence with "what" or "how" and cannot be answered with "yes" or "no" response. They encourage the speaker to

elaborate about their feelings, experience or thoughts.

- “Tell me more about”
- “What would you like to be different next time?”
- “How have things changed for you since last time we talked about family time with your sibling?”
- Avoiding “why” questions
  - “Why” questions can seem judgmental. Instead, use language that encourages understanding without judgment.

#### Reflective activity

**Reflective exercise:** When talking with a colleague, friend or family member, try to have a 5-minute conversation utilising the skills above (soft skills, reflective responses and asking questions). **Carers should consider and reflect on:**

- What was the easiest part?
- What was the hardest part?
- How did the other person feel following the exchange?

#### Further reading

- Review [Healing through care: A yarning resource for kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people in SA](#) (Government of South Australia, 2023)

### 3.3 Take on what I say

#### What we know

Young people express that even in times where they have been listened to by their carers and caseworkers regarding family connection, this does not always mean their views and wishes are implemented in practice. Young people have attributed this to several different factors, including not being specifically asked what they want, or caseworkers and carers not seeming to care about their perspectives. In this consultation, young people felt caseworker practice was impacted by the particular beliefs or attitudes that individual caseworkers have about the young person or their family.

*“It should never be in the too hard basket as that’s how it feels sometimes.” (Young person)*

*“It’s unfair, they make decisions for you and don’t let you have a say about your lives.”  
(Young person)*

*“Having relationships with my siblings makes me feel less lonely” (Young person)*

The Department of Child Protection Practice Approach and legislation requires the department to have regard for and consider the views of all children and young people for all aspects of their care arrangements including sibling contact. It is important that caseworkers acknowledge that young people’s views and wishes in casework is critical to giving them a voice and a sense of power, which young people in care may lack in many other child protection processes and decisions (Jobe et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2016). It is also critical that sibling contact not be used in a coercive way.

*“I always wanted to see my siblings as much as possible. Different offices had different experiences. Past carer of one of my siblings told me when I met as an adult that I was too destructive so we stopped contact, trying to shame me for something I said when I was 6-year-old.” (Young person)*

Sometimes, young people have highlighted that family contact has not occurred due to caseworkers not taking on what the young people have said regarding their family, the amount of contact time they

want or the type of contact. This is occasionally due to a different set of beliefs or values regarding family. It is important that when working with young people in child protection contexts, professionals mitigate their own biases, worldviews or beliefs to ensure that the work being undertaken is consistent with legislation, policy and best practice objectives with the child at the centre. To illustrate an example of how a DCP caseworker undertook regular reassessment and ensured that there were supports in place to facilitate a positive and normalised experience of family contact:

*“We have a very different experience with (one) DCP office, who have approved unsupervised contact, regularly review and update the contact determination as required and provide funding as required. This is particularly important as bio Mum can't afford the cost of food and activities for the siblings in her care and it is a huge expectation of a carer to cover the cost of activities for 6 children.” (Carer of Aboriginal young person, metro)*

## Things to consider

### *Recording and utilising views and wishes*

When communicating with young people in relation to their preferences, views and wishes regarding sibling connection, how this information is recorded is very important:

- Record the young person's preferences for family and sibling connections thoroughly, including details like frequency, location and participants.
- Use language that is familiar to the child or young person and tailor explanations to their specific wishes and memories. Instead of “family contact,” use terms like “family time” or “family connection.”
- Apply family-affirming language from the young person's perspective, honouring their terms for family members and friends.
- Include direct quotes from young people about their sibling connections to ensure their voices are represented in documentation.
- Practice active listening to clearly understand and accurately reflect the young person's intentions and statements.

Carers can support young people having their views and wishes implemented by:

- Ensuring that caseworkers know what young people have said about connection with their siblings.
- Discussing with young people how they can tell caseworkers and other professionals about their experiences of sibling connection.

### *Feedback to young people*

Ensuring that young people receive information regarding their views and wishes provides a feedback loop which assists young people in having confidence that caseworkers and carers have taken on what the young people have to say:

- Where requests have been approved/not approved.
- Dependent on a young person's individual needs, it may be appropriate to contact the young person via phone or email to advise of them updates. The more that caseworkers communicate outcomes of how young people's views and wishes have been taken on, the more trust the young people have in the system to support them to connect with their siblings.

### *Self-awareness*

Understanding one's own beliefs and values helps in understanding the perspectives of young people and being able to ensure appropriate support, particularly when it comes to family dynamics.

Caseworkers and carers can enact this by:

- Reflecting on your own values, beliefs and biases and how these may affect your assessment of family and sibling relationships.
- Doing a self-check in when meeting a young person and their family to ensure that you are aware of what you are bringing to the interaction.
- Seeking professional supervision from diverse professionals to assist in challenging biases which may be present in work with families.

### Reflective activity

**Reflective exercise:** Think about whether you agree with the statements below and reflect on how these how these may reflect your biases. Think about how this may influence your decision making about family time and how you take the young person's perspective into account.

- Family connection is important, as long as it is safe.
- Children cannot love their siblings or families if they have been hurt by them.
- So much can go wrong with sibling contact, it worries me.

### Further reading

- Review [CREATE Foundation's Best Practice Guide: Children and Young People as Decision Makers.](#)

## 3.4 Think about how I feel

### What we know

In the child protection context, family and sibling connection needs to be understood in the context of the trauma of removal from families of origin (AIFS, 2022). Young people consistently reference gaps in caseworker and carer support in relation to trauma-informed practice, including in their experiences of trust, choice, collaboration, safety and empowerment (AIFS, 2022). Young people have said:

*"I felt workers would use clinical/formal methods of dealing with us or our situations." (Young person)*

Research about the qualities and practices that support caregiving to children and young people describes specific attributes, skills and practices such as a responsive caregiving style, warmth, compassion, resilience and the ability to provide a safe family home. Studies show that carers mostly identify love, compassion and patience as being very important for establishing a safe and warm home (AIFS, 2022).

Having realistic expectations of children, being flexible and caring, and applying a trauma-informed lens are seen as important constructs for evidence of a warm and responsive parenting style (AFIS, 2022). Having resilience and a capacity to manage the stress and challenges that may occur in the course of caregiving responsibilities are also considered essential (van der Kolk, 2014; AFIS, 2022).

### Things to consider

#### Safety

Young people must be provided with a safe environment when connecting with their siblings (Mental Health Coordinating Council, n.d.). This will look different for each young person and should be based on their expressed views from them and their families. Additionally, being able to understand

behaviours resulting from trauma, which may occur in the context of sibling contact, can assist in assessing risk, developing appropriate safety plans and responding in a safe way to young people with a trauma history (van der Kolk, 2014; Holden et al., 2020).

To do this, consider an approach based on place and space (Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research, 2010).

Place	Space
<b>What does it look like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it open plan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider familiar environment</li> </ul> </li> <li>Are there clear paths to exit? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider somewhere with multiple exits</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>What does it feel like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it comfortable? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider couches/beanbags</li> </ul> </li> <li>What does the lighting look like? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider warm options</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>What does it sound like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it quiet?</li> <li>Is there music?</li> </ul>	<b>What does it look like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there sensory toys available? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider fidgets or similar</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>What does it feel like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there clear expectations in place? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you spoken with the young person about what they need?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>What does it sound like?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you created an inclusive environment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider a team charter or similar where everyone present agrees to boundaries and communicates what they feel comfortable with</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### *Family time location*

Where possible family time should be normalised as much as possible. It may be helpful to clarify that in cases where it is necessary to facilitate contact at the DCP office, to provide the child or young person with a developmentally appropriate explanation for the reasons for this. To illustrate where an explanation would have been helpful, young people shared their experiences in family time occurring at the DCP office:

*“I hated that visits were in DCP offices.” (Young person)*

*“Contact at DCP offices, we don’t like it. My 2 siblings just ran around in the office, there weren’t any activities for us to do in there. Not much really happens.” (Young person)*

*“I don’t like where contact is at, no one has asked if I like that venue.” (Young person)*

### *Trauma-informed approaches*

Young people who are in the out-of-home care system, can struggle to feel empowered and feel as though they have choice and control over their lives. Some ways practitioners and carers may be able to embed trauma-informed practice include:

- Proactively seeking the views of young people about family time with their siblings, even where young people have chosen not to engage with practitioners in the past. This can include actively visiting the young person, talking to them about their interests, understanding what they like to do and doing activities the child or young person likes to do.
- Acknowledging that within a sibling group, some siblings may wish to have more contact, while others may not want any contact.
- Clearly explaining any challenges or barriers for young people that are on contact with their

families, including their siblings.

- Being transparent with children and young people about decisions relating to sibling time, and not using punitive (punishing) measures such as limiting family time that was already arranged.
- Engaging in specific trauma-informed training which focuses on behaviours of young people with a trauma background. This should also include guidance for caseworkers and carers on how to respond and support young people displaying trauma related behaviours, including harmful sexual behaviours.
- Wherever possible caseworkers and carers can create a sense of certainty and predictability, by providing the child or young person with a clear explanation about what is happening and why.

### Reflective activity

**Reflective exercise:** Reflect on the below statements to determine which of the following you do ‘a little,’ ‘somewhat’ or ‘a lot.’

Reflect on your confidence...	A little	Somewhat	A lot
To create a safe space for young people to connect with their siblings.			
To trust that a young person knows what works for them when it comes to sibling contact.			
To give young people the choice about what their sibling contact looks/feels like.			
To collaborate with young people and involve them in decision making about connecting with their siblings.			
To empower young people to understand what their sibling connection looks/feels like.			

### Further reading

- Review: [Healing through care: A yarning resource for kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people in SA](#)
- Review: [My-Peer-Toolkit-V1-Safe-Space-Monitoring-Tool Guidelines](#)

(Government of South Australia, 2023; Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research, 2010)

## 3.5 Care about my family

### What we know

Adults must recognise the importance of young people developing strong relationships and a safe and trusted support network (AIFS, 2022). For young people in care, this is especially important as each young person holds unique relationships that may include birth family, foster family, other trusted adults, or wider community services (AIFS, 2022).

*“... sibling contact is the single most important thing for children in care. Family breakdown due to parental issues should never be transferred to the sibling group, they [their] care and connection should be at the core of every ... decision.” (Carer, metro SA)*

In care, a young person’s sibling relationships can include birth parents, brothers, sisters and peers in the same foster, kinship or residential placement. These relationships can change if the placement



changes, and different people can be thought of as a sibling (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011). There are three kinds of known sibling arrangements. There are siblings who live with all of their siblings ("together"), siblings who live with only one sibling when others were placed in a different location ("splintered") and siblings who have no siblings at all in their placement ("split") (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2011). Regardless of the placement type, young people must be supported with regular connection to their siblings. There may be instances where a caseworker assesses that family time cannot be fully accommodated due to concerns about safety and wellbeing. It is important to provide an explanation if requests cannot be accommodated either in part or full. *"My caseworker doesn't help me see siblings."* (Young person)

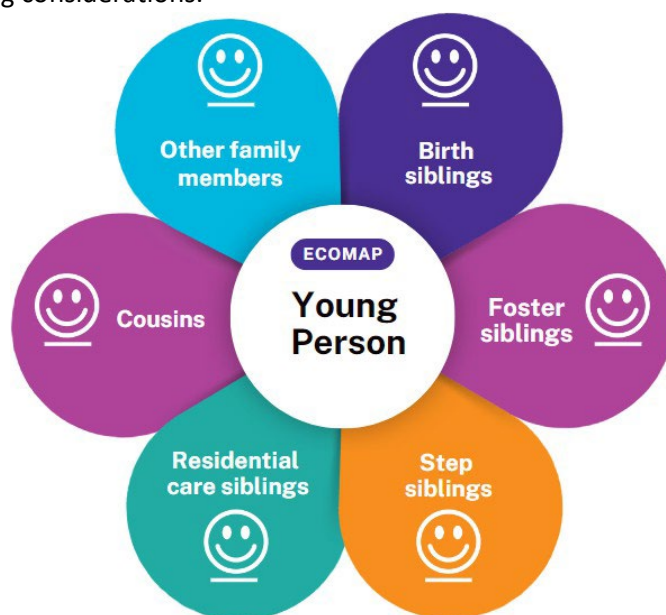
*"It should never be in the too hard basket as that's how it feels sometimes."* (Young person)

*"I barely get to see my other 4 siblings. My worker doesn't give me much info about my biological siblings."* (Young person)

## Things to consider

### Understanding family

To determine who the young person considers a sibling, and what they would like contact to look like, consider an eco-map exercise (Social Workers Toolbox, 2023). This will help the young person to identify who they consider siblings and what contact might look like. An eco-map exercise would include the following considerations:



To complete an eco-map, practitioners can utilise the following steps:

- **Central circle:** Draw a large circle in the centre of the paper and label it with the name of the child or sibling you are focusing on.
- **Family members:** Draw smaller circles around the central one, labelling each with the names of immediate family members, such as siblings, parents, or guardians.
- **Other influences:** Add additional circles or shapes to represent extended family, friends, teachers, and other significant individuals in the child's life.
- **Connections:** Use lines to connect the central circle to these surrounding circles. Vary the thickness, colour and type of line (solid, dashed, etc.) to indicate different types of relationships and levels of closeness or influence.
- **Symbols and annotations:** Include symbols or stickers to represent positive and negative influences or to highlight particularly strong or weak connections.

- **Review and discuss:** Discuss the eco-map with the child and their sibling (with the child's consent), exploring the reasons behind various connections and the nature of relationships. Encourage open communication to understand each other's perspectives and to identify areas for improvement.

### Showing care

Once the young person's biological and identified family are known, it is important to demonstrate care about their siblings and family as this reinforces attachment and connection. Some ways this might be able to happen include:

- Help young people remember siblings' birthdays and celebrate with letters, calls, presents or virtual connections.
- Facilitate sibling bonding with "get to know me" books or sharing discussions.
- Ask family-related questions for case planning. I.e. "What kinds of games do you and your siblings like playing during family time?"
- Address concerns young people raise about their siblings to show you care.

### Reflective activity

**Reflective exercise:** Using the segments above, create an eco-map for yourself. Consider the different relationships in your life and who you go to for support.

- What stood out to you?
- Were there any surprises or links you weren't expecting?
- Is there an area or relationship you would like to strengthen?
  - What are some steps you might take to do that?

## 3.6 Tell me what is going on

### What we know

It is evidenced that young people with a care experience are known to have much higher rates of mental illnesses and overall higher risk of anxiety and stress (Evans et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2021; Tarren-Sweeney, 2017). It is also known that living in care can magnify stress and anxiety for children and young people (González-García et al., 2022). Young people can also experience a low tolerance for uncertainty which stems from not having clear and sufficient information (Lauriola et al., 2023). Uncertainty can be difficult to manage and young people experiencing unpredictability may also experience internal turmoil and can enact behaviours like excessive information seeking, with the aim to remove, reduce or avoid the distress associated with uncertainty (Lauriola et al., 2023).

Involving young people from the outset in decision-making and prioritising clear communication about sibling contact is crucial (CREATE Foundation, 2020). Young people value participation and a sense of autonomy throughout the decision-making process and want to have a say about their care and their family contact (Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, 2020; CREATE Foundation, 2023). CREATE's 2023 South Australian consultation on sibling connection identified how young people often felt left out of communication about contact with siblings, with communication barriers, lack of agency, and caseworker inconsistency emerging as common themes (CREATE Foundation, 2023). This is consistent with feedback from young people as part of the consultation for this Practice Guide.

*"When there was communication it worked really well, they would keep me in the loop and it made me feel good, like I knew what was going on in my life and I could have a say." (Young person)*

*"I didn't understand why DCP didn't let me see my siblings when they were in unsafe relationships"*

*and until these relationships ended it was then DCP allowed me to visit my siblings. They didn't communicate well with me as to why I couldn't see them and didn't know why."* (Young person)

*"Caseworkers being honest and open about reasons why contact may not be able to occur with some siblings due to safety concerns."* (Young person)

Things to consider

*How to communicate about organising contact*

*"Changed workers so often and would make my visits to siblings were challenging. Information, communication would get lost or disregarded in handover."* (Young person)

- Use inclusive, respectful and child/youth-friendly language and:
  - Ask children and young people what is important to them and what they want for sibling contact.
  - Ask, listen, hear and then respond. Don't assume.
  - Encourage participation and involvement in organising contact with siblings.
    - Ask if they have a special place that is important to them for a visit.
    - Ask if there are any special days/celebrations that can be included in the contact plan.
  - Be open and transparent with information sharing and keep the children and young people informed throughout planning for sibling contact.

(Australian Childhood Foundation, 2020; Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, 2020; CREATE Foundation, 2020)

*How to communicate about length/frequency of contact*

*"You never know how long you are going to be able to spend with them."* (Young person)

- Be reassuring and seek to create predictability where possible. Connect with care and compassion through these steps:
  - Provide information and updates as they happen.
  - Encourage the children and young people to have their say.
  - Create the space and time for the children and young people to reflect upon and consider their options and to express their concerns.
  - Be willing to listen and action any requests related to length and frequency of sibling contact.

(Australian Childhood Foundation, 2020; Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, 2020; CREATE Foundation, 2020)

*How to communicate about changes to contact*

*"I don't like where contact is at, no one has asked if I like that venue. Aware that can speak to social worker about this, but they don't answer my phone calls."* (Young person)

- Understand that the feelings and emotions that the children and young people may experience will vary. Seek to:
  - Share the information honestly and explain the changes to sibling contact with care and compassion.
  - Listen well to the children and young people.
  - Demonstrate empathy, compassion, warmth and openness.

(Australian Childhood Foundation, 2020; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2022; Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care, 2020; CREATE Foundation, 2020)

### Reflective activity

**Reflective exercise:** Sibling relationships are fundamental to meaning making, identity, belonging and wellbeing for children and young people living in care. When changes occur to sibling contact or contact does not occur as frequently as the child or young person would like, it can be deeply distressing. Carers should consider the ways that you have communicated any changes to sibling contact for children and young people.

- Did you share this information honestly?
- Did you provide regular and consistent updates?
- Did you demonstrate empathy, compassion, warmth and openness?
- Did you encourage the children and young people to have their say?

## 4. Cultural applications

### 4.1 Get to know me

Aboriginal children and young people are more likely to engage when they are connected to their culture. Culture is central to identity and through culture, young people may experience a strong spirit, mind, place, purpose and have strong relationships plus a strong body. Through the consultation, one young Aboriginal care leaver told CREATE:

*“Spend more time on getting to know the situation of the young person... it just feels like they don’t care if I see them, which is why they should get to know the situation of the sibling contact for that young person.”* (Aboriginal care leaver)

*“All family connection is important for young people in care where appropriate and safe because it provides a connection to birth family, culture, extended family and helps with a sense of identity.”* (Carer for Aboriginal young person)

Carers must ensure that Aboriginal children and young people are connected to their culture, Country and kin. Carers of Aboriginal children and young people should consider the following strategies:



### *Engage with respect for culture*

- Learn about the [wellbeing wheel](#).
- Be mindful that not having access to culture disrupts identity, which is central to creating strength across the many parts of an Aboriginal child or young person.
- Be curious. Learn about the culture of the Aboriginal child or young person in care.
- Ask lots of questions.

(Dudgeon, 2014; Gee, 2014; Headspace, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)

### *Have a yarn*

- Talk about being strong and deadly in as many parts as possible (Headspace, 2024b).
- Ask about parts that need strengthening.
- Let the child or young person know you are supporting them to be strong and deadly.
- Reassure them that they will be linked into their nearest [ACCOS in SA](#) who will be supporting their connection to culture.

(Dudgeon, 2014; Gee, 2014; Headspace, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)

### Reflective activities



Podcast listen: [Supporting Aboriginal culture and identity in out of home care](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Carers should reflect on what they know about the kin, community and culture of the child or young person in their care.

**Carers should:**

- Reflect on the wellbeing wheel with its [eight parts](#) to learn what makes Aboriginal children feel strong and whole.
- Create a [Stronger You Wheel](#) together with the child or young person.
- Consider [Ways To Make A Stronger You](#).

(Dudgeon, 2014; Gee, 2014; Headspace, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)

## 4.2 Fully listen

Yarning is respectful, active and deep listening, while learning, which allows for reflection (New South Wales Government, 2023). It also means that the person leading the yarn participates and shares stories equally. Proper yarning requires a relationship and an understanding of place (New South Wales Government, 2023). Sometimes having a good yarn takes time and because yarning is a living conversation, it must be genuine (Government of South Australia, 2023).

CREATE asked young Aboriginal care leavers “what problems have made it difficult for you to have contact with your siblings?”. One young person described being restrained and experiencing punitive measures, when trying to communicate with caseworkers about wanting to see their siblings:

*“Vocal restraints wouldn’t let me communicate how I needed to. I was upset and angry and would get shutdown or punished for my behaviour removal from premises with or without force. Workers refusing to answer calls. Transport. Constant change of workers also made it so hard to then explain to a new worker that I wanted to see my sibling, sometimes being new they would try and I would have hope but then gets denied.”* (Aboriginal care leaver).

Carers of Aboriginal children and young people should create a cultural space for genuine engagement with young people and consider the following strategies:

### *Create a safe place for yarning*

- Select a safe and readily available place to have a good yarn
  - Consider a room in the family home.
  - Consider sitting outside in a preferred location.
  - Ask the child or young person what a special location is for a good yarn.

### *Let’s have a yarn!*

Carers must consider and reflect on everything the child or young person in their care has recently told them *and* what they may not have told them. Carers should offer to have a good yarn about anything of concern and to have a good laugh. Carers should consider yarning prompts like:

- Do you connect more with the beach or bush?
- Have you ever slept outside under the stars? How did it make you feel?
- If you had a time machine, where would you go and why?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you feel strong?
- What is important to you?

## Reflective activities



**Podcast listen:** [SA kinship carers of Aboriginal children and helping children and young people stay strong in culture](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Carers should reflect on how yarning with the child or young person in their care, is helping them to connect with them more, while also supporting a connection to culture.

### Carers should:

- Choose a place where the child or young person feels safe.
  - How did it feel, was it comfortable and did it encourage deep listening and sharing?
- Ask the child or young person if they had a preferred/different location for a good yarn.
- Reflect on what they shared *and* what they learned in their recent yarn.

## Further reading

- Review [Healing through care: A yarning resource for kinship carers of Aboriginal children and young people in SA](#)

(Government of South Australia, 2023)

### 4.3 Take on what I say

All children and young people want to feel heard, valued and respected. They want their ideas and wishes to be validated. They also want to be involved in making decisions and to have a choice. Aboriginal children and young people may also be accustomed to responsibilities for younger siblings and for protocols around decision making. This means carers must learn appropriate ways of communicating.

When communicating with Aboriginal children and young people, carers must use inclusive and appropriate language to reduce the risk of misunderstanding and distrust. Also, they must be aware of and recognise non-verbal communication styles that may be used by Aboriginal people. Becoming culturally aware of the kin and community that the child or young person is connected to, will help them feel heard and will show them that they are being helped and supported.

CREATE asked young Aboriginal care leavers to describe what sibling contact looked like when living in care. One young person said they said that they were never given the option by the Department for Child Protection to see their siblings and shared this insight:

*“Seeing siblings is more important than seeing mum, ‘cause mum was a source of trauma, siblings are more of a connection, this is specific to my situation” (Young Aboriginal care leaver).*

Carers of Aboriginal children and young people should communicate with inclusive, respectful and child- friendly language and consider the following strategies:

### *Keep channels of communication open*

- Ask the children and young people what they want.
- Ask, listen, hear and then respond. Don’t assume.
- Give children and young people the space and time they need to speak.
- Explain clearly to children and young people the reasons for, and expectations regarding, the decisions being made.



- Enable young people to be involved in the process of choosing which Aboriginal-led and non-Aboriginal led services they wish to use.
- Be open and honest with accurate information for young people to participate in or make their own decisions.

(Emerging Minds, 2024; CREATE Foundation, 2020)

## Reflective activities



Podcast listen: [Nurturing the wellbeing of Aboriginal youth](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Having this connection will strengthen their communication with carers and provide insight around decision making. Carers should reflect on their communication style and language used with the children or young person in their care and consider how they will strengthen their connection to the child or young person.

- Consider a recent situation where the child or young person has made a request for sibling contact.
  - Was their request denied?
  - Was their voice silenced?
  - Was their request considered/actioned?
- Reflect on how you, as the carer, will advocate for and initiate sibling contact for the child or young person.
  - How will you elevate the voice of the child or young person, so their voice and requests are heard?
  - How will you initiate an open and honest information-sharing yarn?
  - How will you enable their participation in decision making?

(Emerging Minds, 2024; CREATE Foundation, 2020)

### 4.4 Think about how I feel

As a result of the continued impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma, Aboriginal children and young people are some of the most traumatised children and young people in Australia. Historical events include displacement from Country, abuse, loss of culture, the Stolen Generations, racism and social marginalisation. Ongoing impacts include systemic racism, discrimination and continued child removal. The [final report](#) from the recent Inquiry advises that better outcomes for Aboriginal children are achieved when Aboriginal people, families and communities lead decision making (see Headline 5) (CACYP, 2024). Through the consultation, one young Aboriginal care leaver told CREATE about the support they received from residential staff:

*“Some workers in residential home that were very passionate about contacting my siblings happen. They asked [him] what I wanted to, they followed up and were persistent with DCP to arrange contact.” (Aboriginal care leaver).*

Carers should empathically connect with the Aboriginal child or young person in their care and respond in a trauma informed way that will strengthen trust in their relationship. Carers should ensure that the Aboriginal child or young person is linked into their nearest [ACCOS in SA](#) to support their connection to culture and access to culturally safe and appropriate services for counselling, trauma services and mental health support.

Carers must ensure that cultural and emotional safety are at the forefront of any trauma-informed responses. Carers should *connect before they seek to correct* with the following [PACE](#) strategies:

#### *Foster a safe space and home daily*

- **Be playful:** making time for play and connection and to defuse tension.
- **Demonstrate acceptance:** understanding why the child or young person is being triggered and choosing to staying calm.
- **Be curious:** feeling a sense of wonder about the meaning of behaviour and what the child or young person is feeling.
- **Be empathic:** feeling compassion for the child or young person and their suffering.

#### Reflective activities



Podcast listen: [SA Kinship carers of Aboriginal children – connection before correction](#)



Podcast listen: [SA Kinship carers of Aboriginal children – when behaviours challenge](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Carers should reflect on their confidence in holding a safe space for the child or young person in their care and where they used play, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

- Consider any situations in the past week where you have connected before you corrected.
  - Describe moments where you focused on being playful to defuse tension.
  - Did you demonstrate acceptance for the child or young person and help them to do things differently?
  - Were you curious about the meaning behind any behaviours?
  - Did you demonstrate and feel empathy for their suffering?

#### 4.5 Tell me what is going on

For Aboriginal children and young people, their kinship system includes grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins, siblings and beyond. Within the kinship system, there are also particular responsibilities, social obligations and cultural protocols that will only be learned through yarning with the child or young person and their kin. When children are removed from their kinship system, their connection to their identity, support system and culture is disrupted. It also means that Aboriginal children and young people living in care are not able to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities for their kin, which can bring a profound sense of loss, grief, stress and anxiety (K. Rogers, Senior Manager, Cultural Clinician Aboriginal Family Support Services Ltd, personal communication, June 24, 2024). This broken connection to culture and kin and inability to meet obligations and responsibilities places Aboriginal children and young people at enormous risk, which must be mitigated (K. Rogers, Senior Manager, Cultural Clinician Aboriginal Family Support Services Ltd, personal communication, June 24, 2024).

Prioritising Aboriginal children's connection to their culture and kin will ensure that they are connected to and have a sense of belonging to their family and community. They will be able to fulfil their obligations and meet their responsibilities for their kin (K. Rogers, Senior Manager, Cultural Clinician Aboriginal Family Support Services Ltd, personal communication, June 24, 2024). Through the

consultation, one young Aboriginal care leaver told CREATE about the kin support they received to coordinate sibling contact:

*“My maternal grandparents were my only help and support. They fought, they made calls, they emailed, they done a lot and I never seen them.” (Aboriginal care leaver).*

*“Nothing worked well, always changing of workers and had barely any communication with me. Never explained about anything about removal from parents or why siblings contact was not occurring. Never had a say about what contact looks like. I never knew I could have a say about how I want sibling contact to look. I never had the option. Give children and explain to them their rights.*

*Have specific DCP rights for children:*

- You’re allowed to ask to see your siblings;*
- You’re allowed to ask what happening;*
- You’re allowed to say no to contact; and*
- You’re allowed to have that information.”*

*(Aboriginal care leaver)*

Non-Aboriginal carers may not be familiar with the family, community or culture of the Aboriginal child in their care. Carers must commit to developing this knowledge and connection through linking the child or young person to their nearest [ACCos in SA](#) to support their connection to culture and family.

Carers also have an important role in supporting the implementation of the Aboriginal Cultural Identity Support Tool (ACIST), which is included in each child or young person's case plan. It is equally important that carers work collaboratively with caseworkers when exploring the child or young person's cultural or family connections. This is essential if there are sensitivities requiring the support of a Principal Aboriginal Consultant (PAC) to navigate conversations respectfully and appropriately.

Carers must also consider the following strategies:

#### *Commit to learning about the kinship system*

- Watch this one-minute clip on [Understanding Kinship](#) for Aboriginal children and young people.
- Have a yarn with the child or young person about their kin.
- Explore what is known about the [Aboriginal Life Story work](#) of the child or young person.
- Contact the nearest [ACCos in SA](#) who will be support the connection to kin and family-mapping.

(Government of South Australia, n.d.; Reconciliation Australia, 2013)

### Reflective activities



Podcast listen: [Supporting young people through an Aboriginal cultural lens](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Carers should reflect on what they learnt this week about the kinship system of the child or young person in their care.

- Consider what is now known through yarning with the child or young person.
  - Did you learn about kin that your child or young person deeply longs for?

- Have you considered ways to strengthen their connection to kin?

#### 4.6 Care about my family

Studies with Aboriginal children have found that although some young people felt disconnected from their siblings and did not want contact, many desired to be placed with them and to stay in contact with them, with many older siblings holding a strong sense of responsibility to look after younger ones (Higgins et al., 2006; Long & Sephton, 2011; Moore., 2007).

Aboriginal children and young people living in care may have limited contact with their kinship system, which disrupts their connections to many of their fundamental relationships. Extended kin may have equal importance to that of the biological family members, which means they hold obligations and decision-making responsibilities for the Aboriginal child in care.

Self-determination enables Aboriginal children and their families to be at the forefront of decision making. Principles underpinning [SA's Aboriginal Family-led Decision-Making model](#) (AFLDM) for Aboriginal families involve elevating the voices of young Aboriginal children in decision making and acknowledging that kin have the right to participate in decisions relating to the child (Government of South Australia, 2021). The model emphasises that kin must be included in the decision making process and without coercion, and that family decision making does not require a professional to be present (family engagement is strengths based and solution focused). The model states that kin are also best placed to lead family mapping (genograms) and eco-mapping (family, kin and community networks) which can support the connections to siblings and other important family members (Government of South Australia, 2021).

When CREATE consulted with young Aboriginal care leavers, young people said:

*“Changed fosters carers too many times – moved around too much. I didn’t know what was going on.” (Aboriginal care leaver)*

Although non-Aboriginal carers may not have a strong understanding of the family, community or culture of the Aboriginal child in their care, it is important that they be willing to participate in the AFLDM model, as this will strengthen the connections to siblings and kin, for the young child in their care. They must also commit to linking the child or young person to their nearest [ACCos in SA](#) to support their connection to culture and family. Carers also play an important role in supporting the implementation of the ACIST that is included in each child or young person’s case plan. Working collaboratively with caseworkers to support the child or young person’s cultural connections is equally important.

Carers must consider the following strategies:

#### *Be willing to participate in Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making*

- Have a yarn with the child or young person about their kin.
- Contact the nearest [ACCos in SA](#) to support the connection to kin.
- Support self-determination as a right, which enables Aboriginal children to have their voice heard. To illustrate examples of what this might look like young people told CREATE:

*“Want more time.” (Aboriginal young person)  
(Young person has determined they want sibling time).*

*“Never had a say about what contact looks like,  
I never knew I could have a say about how I want sibling contact to look,  
I never had the option” (Aboriginal young person)*

## Reflective activities



Podcast listen: [Building connections in the out-of-home sector](#)

**Reflective exercise: Aboriginal children and young people must be supported to stay connected to their culture.** Carers should reflect on ways they could support the child or young person in their care to reconnect with their kin, culture and community. Carers should:

- Consider the benefits of the protective factors for the child or young person.
  - Has the young person shared insights about their longing for their kin, culture and community?

## 5. Conclusion

In reading this Practice Guide, CREATE's wish for caseworkers and carers is that they reflect deeply on how they are or are not currently supporting children and young people to meaningfully connect with their siblings. It is recommended that all carers and practitioners try some of the practices and reflective activities outlined in this guide. Young people are calling on all of us who are involved in their care to listen deeply to their voices and wishes, and to support them in creating a sense of belonging, coherence, identity and hope through the relationships that matter to them. And young people continually tell us that sibling relationships really matter.

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# Appendices

## A. About CREATE

CREATE Foundation (CREATE) is the national consumer body for children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We represent the voices of over 45,000 children and young people currently in care, and those who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25. Our vision is that all children and young people with a care experience reach their full potential. Our mission is to create a better life for children and young people in care. To do this we:

- **CONNECT** children and young people to each other, CREATE and their community *to*
- **EMPOWER** children and young people to build self-confidence, self-esteem, and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard *to*
- **CHANGE** the care system, in consultation with children and young people, through advocacy to improve policies, practices and services and increase community awareness.

We achieve our mission by facilitating a variety of programs and services for children and young people in care and developing policy and research to advocate for a better care system. CREATE is committed to consulting with children and young people in care, in a way that enables them to have their voices heard, empowers them, and values their experiences.

## B. Context

Sibling connection in the South Australian out-of-home care system is a critical area of concern due to the disruptive impact of care placements on sibling relationships, which are known to be a protective factor supporting the wellbeing of children and young people (CREATE Foundation, 2023). In South Australia, as of 30 June 2022, there were 4,417 young people living in care and only 11% had safely returned to (reunified with) their family (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [AIHW], 2023). There is no data on how many siblings are placed together or the significance of co-placement for siblings (AIHW, 2023). The South Australian Department for Child Protection has developed policies to support children living in care, emphasising the importance of maintaining family and cultural connections (Government of South Australia, 2024). The [Family Contact Practice Paper](#) and [Reunification Practice Paper for Children and Young People](#) provide frameworks to help caseworkers maintain and rebuild the connections between children and their families (Government of South Australia, 2022a, 2022b). The rights of children in care to connect with their siblings are also protected under the [Charter of Rights for Children and Young people in care](#), which aligns with the National Standards for Out of Home Care, particularly Standards 9 and 10 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Guardian for Children and Young People, n.d.).

However, a significant challenge remains as many children in care become separated from their siblings (Australian Institute Family Studies, [AIFS], 2022; McDowall, 2015). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory, emphasises the importance of sibling connections, stating that children have a right to family and cultural continuity (Alexander, 2022; United Nations, 2007). Despite these guidelines, many young people in care in South Australia report infrequent contact with their siblings and express frustration with the lack of support from caseworkers.

In Australia, some states are making changes to their legislation, to make sure that Aboriginal children grow up safe and strong within family, community and culture. These changes also mean that Aboriginal-led services can ensure that children have contact with family, community and culture. See Appendix for list of amended legislation across jurisdictions. However, South Australia is the only Australian state not to mention siblings in its legislation [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act \(2017\)](#) (Government of South Australia, 2024a). In June 2022, the South Australian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People announced an [Inquiry](#) into the removal and placement of Aboriginal children (Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, [CACYP], 2024). The [final report](#) provided findings and recommendations to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in the care system and to make sure that those who do enter the care system grow up safe and strong within family, community and culture (CACYP, 2024).

A recent consultation conducted by the CREATE Foundation in South Australia in 2023, highlighted the ongoing issues faced by young people in the care system in relation to sibling relationships (CREATE Foundation, 2023). The consultation, which involved 26 young people aged 12-18 years, revealed that 70% of the participants were living apart from all of their siblings, with those in residential care experiencing the most pronounced separations (CREATE Foundation, 2023). This had led to feelings of disconnection and frustration, specifically due to the insufficient support from caseworkers (CREATE Foundation, 2023). Only a small fraction of the respondents had regular contact with their siblings (CREATE Foundation, 2023).

These consultation findings indicate the urgent need for systematic improvements to better support sibling bonds. The young participants emphasised the importance of sibling relationships, with a

majority expressing a desire for more frequent contact. The participants called for better communication and responsiveness from caseworkers and carers to facilitate these connections. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing the relational stability and wellbeing of children in care, ensuring that their rights to maintain meaningful family relationships are respected and prioritised.

## C. Formulating the Practice Guide

In developing this practice guide, CREATE consulted with 30 young people aged 11-26 years and living across South Australia, through a series of engagement activities held between April and June 2024. Contextual information for this project was derived from CREATE's 2022-23 consultation on Sibling Connection, and from CREATE's Advocacy in Action workshop session on Sibling Contact and Connection, held in Adelaide in March 2024, as part of CREATE's Voices in Action conference.

Young people were also consulted at critical points throughout the project to inform the scoping of the method and guidance. In the first instance, CREATE Young Consultants were involved in testing and validating the approach to engaging with young people in this project. A Young Consultant briefing was also held on 6 March 2024 at CREATE's South Australian office to facilitate this work.

Further to this, direct consultations and engagement at connection events was conducted to support the development of the Practice Guide. Data collection with young people took place through semi-structured focus groups and one-on-one semi-structured interviews on the following dates:

Date	Mode	Number of YP	Age (years)
15 April (Regional)	Face to Face (YAG)	5	11, 11, 13, 14, 17
18 April (Regional)	Face to Face	7	14, 16, 15, 11, 12, 13 + 13
19 April	Over phone	1	18
23 April	Face to Face	2	14, 17
2 May	Over Microsoft Teams	2	21, 23
20 May	Over phone	1	13
1 June	Face to Face (Connection event)	6	12, 12, 12, 13, 15, 15
12 June	Over phone	1	22
	Over Teams	1	24
13 June	Over phone	2	25, 26
14 June	Over phone	1	23
18 June	Over phone	1	11

Table 1: Summary of data collection dates and mode, participant counts, and age distribution

In addition to engaging directly with young people, the project included written interview responses with carers facilitated by Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers South Australia. Further insights from the Direct Experience Group facilitated by The Reilly Foundation provided a valuable parent perspective. Importantly, collaboration with Aboriginal Family Support Services was crucial for the development of the cultural consideration sections. Finally, continued engagement with children and young people during all stages of data collection provided a comprehensive and inclusive approach to elevate the voices of children and young people.

## D. Evaluation and monitoring

### Planned implementation

This framework and practice guide is designed to be implemented across a variety of contexts within the child protection sector. The hopscotch framework can be utilised by caseworkers, carers and professionals who engage with young people in relation to their connection with their siblings and families. In planning for implementation of this Practice Guide, some of the following considerations should be adopted:

- **Consider the audience and delivery** – This Practice Guide is intended for any carers or sector professionals who want to strengthen their practice in relation to sibling connection for young people in out-of-home care. However, there are opportunities for this Practice Guide to be delivered in a training context.
- **Determine the outcomes/goals of best practice** – CREATE anticipates that in utilising this Practice Guide effectively, young people will report higher satisfaction in relation to contact and connection with their siblings. Further, trackable data such as frequency of contact with siblings or number of young people with sibling connection plans could be utilised from a to monitor implementation and impact of this guide.
- **Timeframe of implementation** – As practice change is a complex process involving behaviour change and reflection across a large number of individual practitioners, planning, reinforcement, and embedding of new practices in existing processes, policies and professional supervision is essential.
- **Mechanisms for ensuring effectiveness** – In implementing this Practice Guide, it is vital to ensure that there are clear mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness, including:
  - Methods to gain feedback from young people, carers and caseworkers individually.
  - Mechanisms to track existing good practice; for example, a 'sibling contact' component of traditional family contact recording.
  - A structured evaluation to ascertain the effectiveness of implementation and any impact on outcomes related to sibling connection following implementation of the Practice Guide.





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