



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**



CLAN Midland
COMMUNITY LINK & NETWORK

Differing Perspectives



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as traditional custodians of this land. We pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise the long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on this land and acknowledge that the past is not just the past. The past, the present and the future are, as they always are, part of each other – bound together.

Foreword

The journey through child protection is an emotional and difficult one which involves a number of people including parents, children, family supports and professionals. This journey is enhanced when each group respects and recognises their different perspectives.

As our perspectives are built from our own experiences and understandings, it can be difficult to reach a common ground. With that in mind, this publication was produced with the hope of bringing all parties a little closer together.

This publication is a joint initiative between the Department of Communities, Community Link and Network (CLAN) Midland and the Family Inclusion Network of WA (Fin WA).

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Missing Voices

We acknowledge the child and carer voices are absent in this document; we acknowledge the profound and undeniable importance of their voice and participation as central in the child protection journey.

As practitioners, we identified a gap in the exploration of the worker/parent relationship, and have chosen to focus specifically on exploring and building upon the adult relationships between the child protection worker, parent and support agencies. In doing so we hope to build upon these relationships and create positive change for the child in the process.



“These are my carer’s hands. We do lots of things together. My carer and me took lots of photos with our hands one day and this one is my favourite.”

Child in care

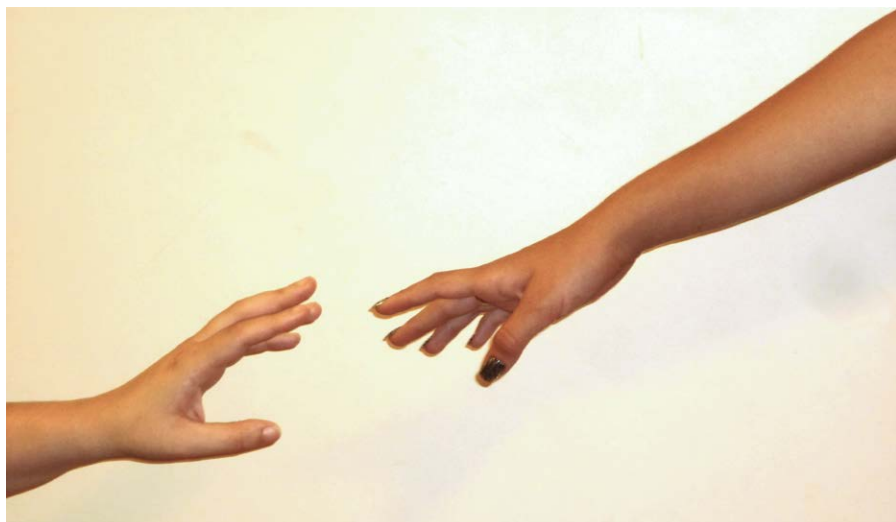
The purpose of this booklet

Hope for greater understanding

This project aims to help those on the child protection journey understand each other. We hope it will:

- Raise our awareness of the challenges facing all of us
- Help us understand each other's perspective
- Encourage honest discussion and help everyone feel heard and valued.

Our best hope is that it will help build relationships.



Key messages

In talking through each of the following topics, we came to realise some key pieces of advice kept arising. We feel each of these key messages underpins the advice within every topic and the overall hope of building better relationships.

Connect:

Talk, listen and share with each other – it's all about taking the time to communicate

Be understanding:

Place ourselves in the other person's shoes

Be supportive:

Respect for one another will build our relationship

Build trust:

Working towards earning the trust of one another.

“I was fighting the system, now I fight to achieve my goals for my children.”

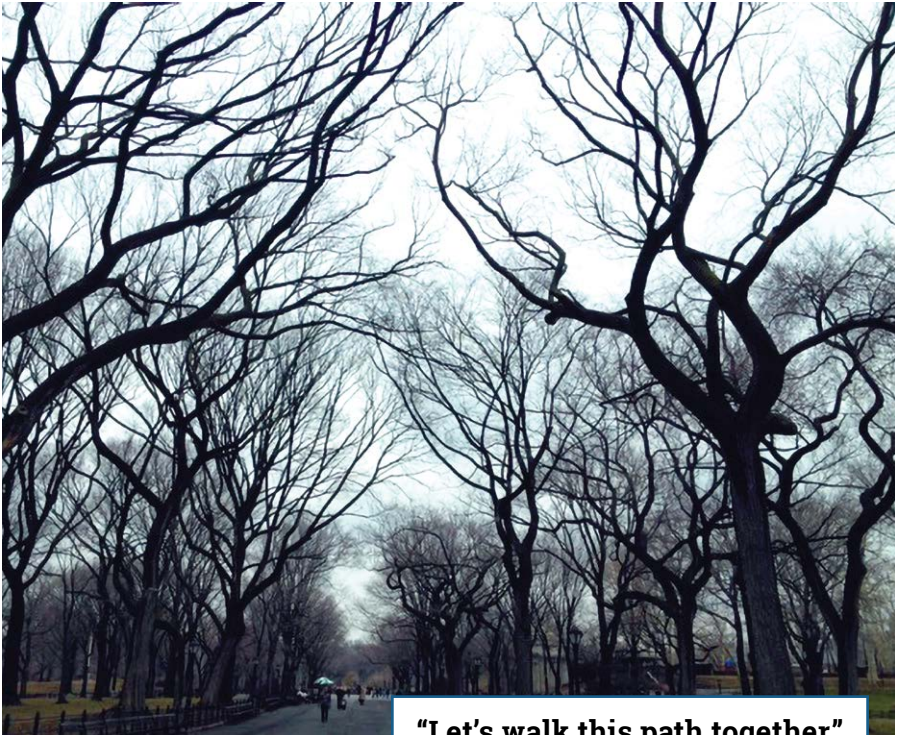
Parent

Communication

On the child protection journey we are all trying to work together. It is deeply emotional and personal work; we can all feel overwhelmed.

Sharing our concerns and listening to each other can help.

We all need to be heard.



“Let’s walk this path together.”

Child protection worker

Parents

“Of course I’m angry!
You don’t listen to me and
you don’t care. I’m fighting
to get my children back.”

Workers

“They don’t listen to our
concerns; they are too
busy arguing with us.
They don’t hear what they
need to do to get their
child back.”



Key message:

CONNECT

**It’s all about communication.
Talk, listen and share with each other.**

What can we consider, talk about or do?

Child protection

Listen: It can be overwhelming if parents feel they are not heard or respected.

Create a safe space: Reflect on ways you can support parents to express their feelings and grief.

Empathise: Underneath avoidance or angry behaviour may be anxiety, fear and grief. Acknowledge the feelings behind the behaviours you encounter, and ask, 'how can I help?'



Parents

Find ways to keep calm: Take time out, seek support, breathe. If you are angry when communicating, it is harder for you to truly be heard.

Help others help you: Let those working with you know what you need to feel heard, and what works well for you (eg: phone calls, meetings, best times to speak, worst times to meet etc).



Family/support people

Talk about feelings: Help parents label how they are feeling and communicate this to their workers.

Build a bridge: Help build a bridge between the worker and the parent by helping them to understand each other.

“ I have always felt like I can't be myself when dealing with The Department so I have always worn this mask. Now the mask has come off and I feel proud to be my real self. ”

Parent

Relationships

The relationship between a child protection worker and a parent is filled with challenges from the beginning. It starts at a point of pain and grief for a parent and a point of emotion and challenges for the worker. Together they can focus on the child to overcome even the biggest hurdles.



“The one detail concerning my youth I’m most filled with gratitude for, is the people – these people have surrounded me and allowed me to channel the times of instability into positivity.”

Child in care

Parents

“What would this young kid know? She isn’t even a parent. She is straight out of Uni and doesn’t know anything! What right does she have to tell me what to do?”

“That tag is a constant reminder to me that you have the power to take away my children.”



Workers

“I know I am young but I am trained to do this job. I’m not going to tell you I know what you are going through but you can help me understand.”

“My ID tag gets me in and out of the building.”



Key message:

BE SUPPORTIVE

**Relationships are a two way street,
be supportive of each other.**

What can we consider, talk about or do?

Child protection

Be mindful: Parents often feel the burden of shame, guilt and judgement. Child protection workers can help parents by being sensitive and empathetic.

Acknowledge the expert: Parents know their child well and may offer valuable information and solutions. Provide opportunities for parents to contribute.

Explain your role: Help parents understand exactly what your role is e.g. your focus is to help keep children safe and help return children home.



Parents

Speak up: If a workers actions are embarrassing or upsetting you, respectfully let them know.

Learn about the team: Child protection workers report to a manager and are part of a team. Learn about the team of people who are working with you to make decisions about your child.



Family/support people

Talk about feelings: Help parents understand how they feel and to communicate this.

Build a bridge: Help build a bridge between the worker and parents by helping them to understand each other.

“So when the children first went into care it changed from me knowing about what they were doing on a daily basis, to me being given very limited updates on what they were doing. I don’t know what they were doing at any time of the day. I did not know if they had eaten all their dinner, done their homework, had a bath, or what time they went to bed. This played on my mind, as suddenly I felt completely locked out of everyday life.”

Parent

Information Sharing and Decision Making

The child protection journey is different for each person. The information being shared and discussed is highly sensitive, personal and emotional. The decisions being made will be some of the most important decisions ever made. Focusing on the child and putting yourself in the other person's shoes may change the way you see, think, feel and respond.



“Reflections are being able to make changes. Looking at what happened before and making the future better. Making a difference, facing the hard stuff and making it better.”

Child in care

Parents

"They took my children on Friday afternoon. I'm sitting here all weekend not knowing what's going on and with no one to contact."

"You tell me I wasn't protective and now you expect me to be OK with not knowing anything about who is looking after them or where they are."



Workers

"The last thing we want to do is bring a child into care. It is a last resort, but our job is to keep children safe."

"We can't tell you where your child is; they are safe with a foster family."



Key message:

BE SUPPORTIVE

**Try to remember to put yourself
in the other person's shoes.**

What can we think about, discuss or do?

Child protection

A parent may be more able to engage with you if they feel:

Informed: Provide as much information as possible to the parent about the child, and the person who is caring for them.

Supported: Make arrangements to meet with the parent as soon as possible.

Reassured: Making arrangements for contact as soon as possible can be reassuring and comforting for a parent.

Empowered: Ask a parent for information about their child that will help them settle into their placement (eg: food, activities, routines).

Parents

Seek support: Talk to someone you trust and who will be supportive.

Stay focused: Focus on your child and do what you need to for them.

Be informed: Ask for information that may help you feel reassured.

Share your knowledge: Help your child by sharing information that may help those who are caring for them (eg: favourite food, toys, routines).

Family/support people

Provide support: The loss of a child is traumatic. Ask parents what you can do to help.

Advocate: Help parents be heard.

Empower: Help parents gain the information and understanding they need at this time.

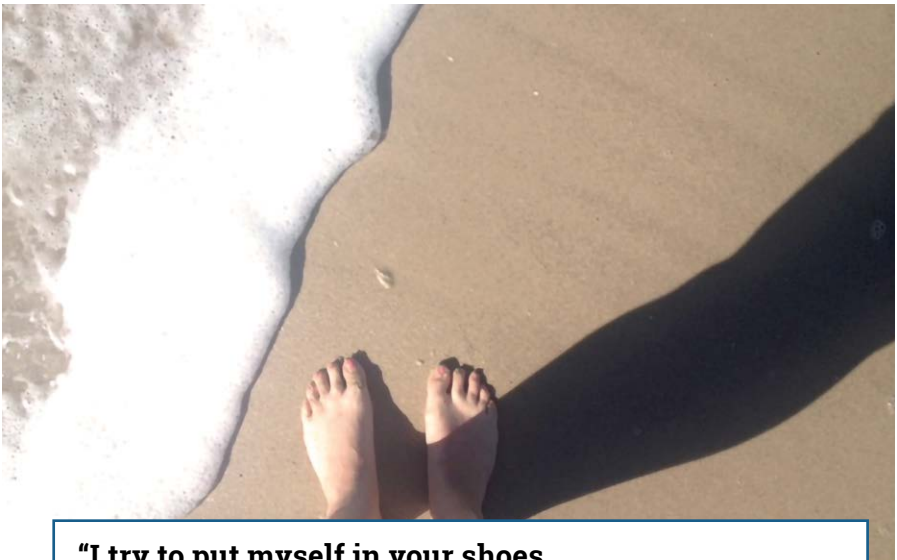
“ Living in care means that my brothers and sisters all live in different places, with different families, far away and I don’t get to see them often. I love it when they are here, but saying goodbye is always hard and reminds me of the reasons our family aren’t together. ”

Child in care

Contact Visits

Contact visits can be one of the best and worst parts of the child protection journey for all involved. In their grief, both parents and children may want to see each other yet struggle with having to say goodbye.

Support people may witness the child or parents roller-coaster of emotion before, during and after visits. Workers may struggle to meet the logistical and emotional support needs that contact can bring in their role, the resources available and the needs of everyone involved.



**"I try to put myself in your shoes,
I start to see things from your perspective,
I reflect what it must be like in your world ...
I get just a faint view of what it must be like for you,
but I will never know how heavy those feet must feel."**

Child protection worker

Parents

"It is totally unfair. I barely get to see my children as it is. It is their responsibility to make sure someone is there to supervise. Me and the children are being punished for something that is not our fault."

"No one else will listen to me! It's my only chance to be heard. I don't get any other time to talk about it."

Workers

"There is no one available to supervise your contact today so I have to cancel your visit. I am very sorry, it is completely out of my control."

"It is not OK to talk about your frustrations with child protection at contact visits. It might upset the child and it also means you are missing out on important time talking with your child."



Key message:

BE SUPPORTIVE

**Ask for support when things feel stuck
or when you don't feel heard,
others may be able to help.**

What can we think about, discuss or do?

Child protection

Establish a goal: Supporting a parent to identify their goals for contact can help maintain a focus at visits.

Provide feedback: Clear guidance and information about what is and isn't appropriate can help a parent adapt their behaviour. (Guidance might be visual vs just verbal eg: charts, drawings)

Validate feelings: Contact being cancelled can be upsetting for parents and children. Validate their feelings. Acknowledge it is frustrating and upsetting, and provide explanations for cancellations.



Parents

Be clear: What do you want your visits to look and feel like? What will help this to happen? What is unhelpful? Give this information to your worker and supervisor.

Back up plan: Explore with your worker others that could supervise your visits if child protection staff are not available.



Family/support people

Lend an ear: Encourage the parent to talk with you about their concerns rather than with their contact supervisors.

Support: Provide support to request a meeting or explore solutions to issues with contact visits.

Be understanding: Missing a contact visit is upsetting for everyone.



Did I do enough or say too much?

Should we make a stand or are we being too tough?

The day has ended but my mind has not.

The reflections have started and they will not stop.

I saw their pain, I heard their cries.

I can see the hollow forming in her eyes.

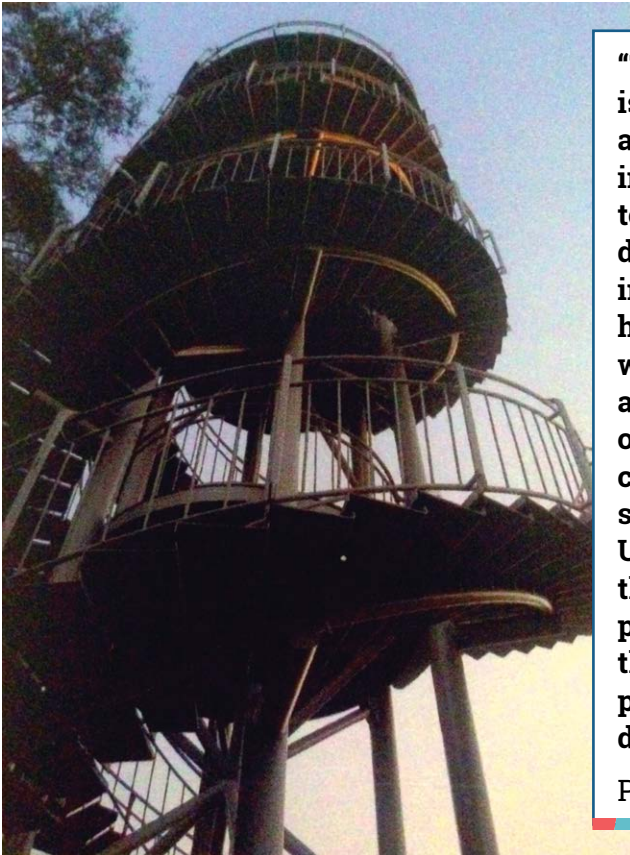
Supposed to support you when I'm the one you hate.

Trying to create some change, hoping it's not too late.

Child protection worker

Meetings

Sometimes meetings in the child protection journey feel like they are never ending, yet they are all important. Both parents and workers can feel nervous about how the meeting is going to go and what the outcomes will be. Meetings provide everyone with an opportunity to try and understand each other's point of view, to ensure that everyone is heard, and to seek out the voice of the child. Whilst meetings can sometimes be emotional and challenging, it helps when everyone remembers the focus of their journey – the child.



“The Department is at the top of a seemingly insurmountable tower looking down on you in judgement, highlighting your weaknesses. You are at the bottom of the tower, climbing up one step at a time. Understanding the Department’s perspective from this vantage point can be hell difficult at times.”

Parent

Parents

"It's just another meeting. It isn't going to change anything."

"It's intimidating and I'm going to hear what I've done wrong and lots about the past. I'm worried it will all be used against me."

Workers

"Meetings are a chance for child protection workers and parents to get together and figure out a way forward."

"A chance to discuss strengths, worries, what needs to happen and brainstorm solutions together."



Key message:

BE RESPECTFUL

**Everyone deserves to have a voice,
to be heard and to be respected.**

What can we think about, discuss or do?

Child protection

Share: Where possible, information should be shared with the family before any meeting so there are no surprises.

Acknowledge: Meetings can be difficult for the family and for workers. It can help to say this before getting started, and offer breaks when needed.

Be prepared: Have a clear purpose and arrive with all of the information needed to help the meeting succeed.



Parents

Be informed: Find out what the meeting is about and what is expected of you.

Plan: Write down what you would like to say in a meeting and what you feel would work best for your child.

Get support: Bring a support person if you feel it will help, and ask for breaks if you need them.



Family/support people

Prepare: Parents may need support to prepare for a meeting. e.g. writing down what they wish to say, if they would like to take a break etc.

Clarify: If you attend a meeting, help clarify information where needed, and support parents to express what they wish to say.

Debrief: Parents may need to talk about the meeting afterwards.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of our organisations in providing us the time to work on this project over many years and see it come to fruition.

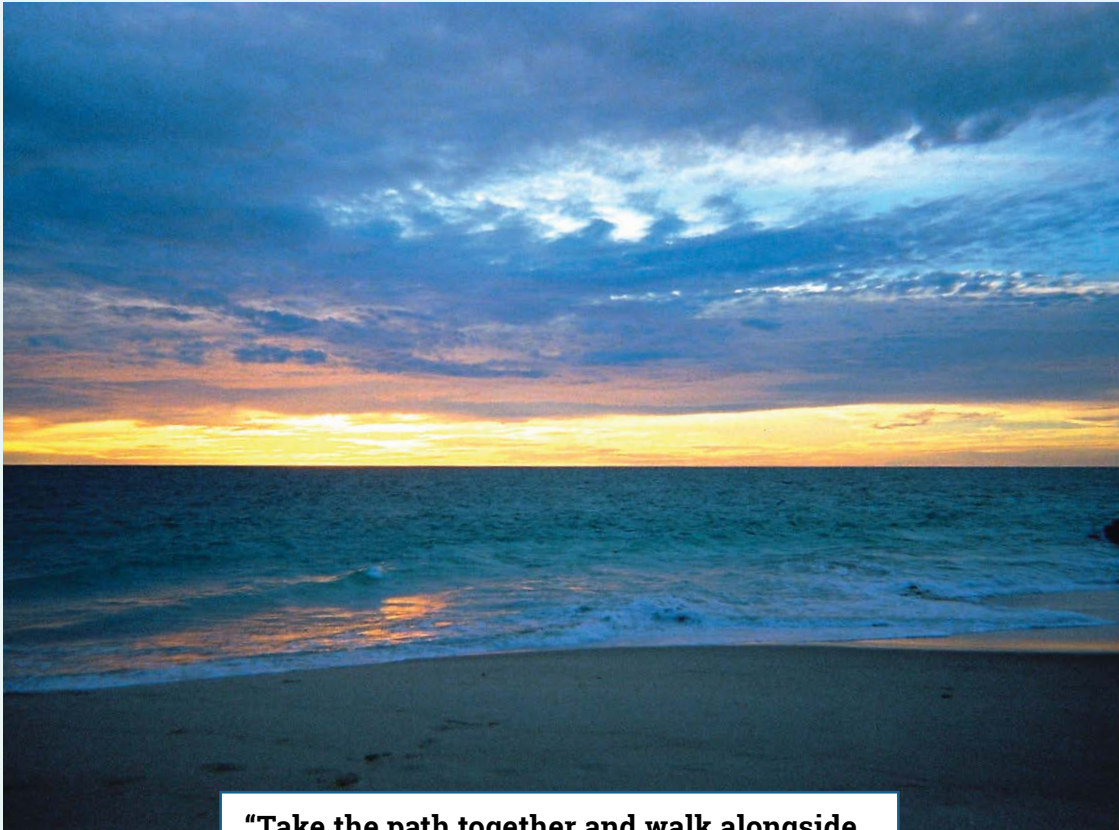
Many people have contributed to this resource – parents, family members, foster carers, children in care, support workers, and staff in our respective organisations.

We sincerely thank everyone, particularly those who generously shared their time, experience and images for us to explore the important relationship between those who are on this journey.

We also wish to acknowledge the grief that is so deep, in particular for parents, but also for workers and support people. Thank you for exploring the journey with us. It can be intense, raw and heart-breaking and we must all find a way to work together.

THANK YOU





“Take the path together and walk alongside one another, be the change you want to see.”

Child protection worker

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