Confidentiality – Information Sheet

Protecting confidentiality

The Department of Communities (the Department) places paramount value on the confidentiality and privacy of its clients. As a foster, family or significant other carer (carer), you are entrusted with confidential information to assist you in your caring role. The types of information you will receive include the reason for the care arrangement and the needs of the child. More than likely, while the child remains in your care, you will continue to receive additional confidential information about the child and their family.

Carers have responsibilities under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act) for handling information or material received about a child in care and their family.

The following guidelines should be adhered to:

- Confidential information specific to the child's or his/her family's circumstances should not be shared unless this is necessary to protect the child's wellbeing.

- If you have concerns about the child in your care, their family, your safety or that of your family, you should contact the child protection worker who has case management responsibility (referred to as the child's case manager).

- You must not provide any information or material about a child in your care to the media or any other media source (for example newspaper, television, radio and social media), or allow media access to the child.

- You must not publish photos, video or other material on the Internet or any other form of communication such as Facebook, Instagram or email that will, or is likely to, lead to the identification of the child (under section 237 of the Act).

The Department has a duty of care to appropriately share information about a child and their family that affects the wellbeing of the child or the safety of the carer and their family.

Department workers and carers should not promise a child or the child's family that they would not disclose information to another source (for example, disclosures of abuse and/or neglect).

If you are unsure about what you can and cannot share, please talk to the child's case manager and/or senior child protection worker placement services.

1

Records and other written or electronic information about the child

To protect the confidentiality of records and other written or electronic information about a child in the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department's care, follow the guidelines below:

- Store documents containing information about the child in the CEO's care in a locked container, such as a filing cabinet or safe.

- If electronic documents are stored on a computer, protect them with a password that only you know.

- Secure your home appropriately to protect you and the child in your care from a home invasion and/or the theft of sensitive and valuable personal information.

- When the child leaves your care, hand back all written information about them to the case manager and delete all information stored electronically.

The case manager will have copies of all electronic and other important documents.

Sharing private information with friends and extended family

It is understandable that you may want to discuss aspects of being a carer with supportive friends, family and other carers in formal and informal settings. However, you must not disclose private information about a child in your care, even with these people. This means not sharing information on the child in a 'disguised' form e.g. referring to them by another name).

Helping children in your care answer difficult questions

You can help the child in your care respond to difficult questions by assuring them that they do not have to answer every question they are asked. In an age-appropriate way, help the child work out answers to some common questions about being in the CEO's care, which he or she feels comfortable to say. Rehearse these with the child to build their confidence.

Some possible responses the child may say or do in reply to questions are:

- "I need to live where it's safe right now".

- "I don't want to talk about this".

- "I'd rather keep these personal issues to myself".

- They may just wish to walk away.

If other children ask the child about being in care, the child could respond in the following ways:

- "Now I have two families who love me".

- "I'm living with a new family for a while to help keep me safe, but I'd rather not talk about it anymore", and suggest they walk away.

What should I do if the child does not want me to share information with the Department?

In the course of caring for a child in the CEO's care, it is likely that the child will confront you with some form of disclosure. While it is very reassuring to have the child trust you enough to tell you information that is personal to him or her, it is important that you let the child know that you have to pass the information onto the case manager.

Some possible explanations you can use in response with the child include:

- "I'm happy you shared your secret worries with me, but as a foster carer I need to tell the Department because I can see that it is troubling you / giving you nightmares / bothering you. Let's talk about how we can bring this up with your case manager."

- "What's the worst thing that could happen if the Department knew what you just told me? What is the best thing that could happen?"

- "I will do my best to keep you safe".

While the carer-child relationship is critical to the success of the care arrangement, the partnership and sharing of information between the carer and case manager is just as important.

Further information

Contact the case manager or senior child protection worker placement services if you need more information about maintaining confidentiality or need extra support.

Contact information

Department of Communities

Telephone: (08) 9222 2555

Country free call: 1800 622 258

Web: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Foster Care Association of Western Australia

Telephone: (08) 9384 5577

Country free call 1800 641 911

Website: www.fcawa.com.au