



Use of Physical Punishment and Inappropriate Discipline

Information for prospective carers

The Department of Communities (Communities) must be certain that approved foster carers, family carers and significant others (carers) meet all competencies specified in the Children and Community Services Regulations 2006 (Regulation 4, Approval of carers). This includes making sure that the carer, as well as providing a safe living environment, can care for a child in a way that promotes their wellbeing, promotes the child's family and interpersonal relationships, and protects the child from harm. This includes using behaviour management strategies that are trauma-informed and do not cause fear or further harm to the child.

Communities is, and has to be, committed to placing a child in care in a home where the responsible adults or carers do not use discipline such as physical punishment, restraint, deprivation of basic needs or anything else that may be detrimental to the child.

This applies to carer applicants who use such discipline on their own children while promising not to treat a foster child this way.

Management of a child's behaviour

Many children who are removed from their family and placed into care will have lived through a range of traumatic childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect, and often have complex needs. Past trauma can make it much harder for them to think clearly and react calmly, even when doing ordinary day-to-day activities. They can sometimes behave in ways that are challenging or difficult to understand.

Carer applicants must demonstrate that they are able to manage a child's behaviour without the use of inappropriate discipline, such as:

- saying mean things to upset or frighten the child
- using words and names to put down the child or make them feel bad about themselves
- locking up (inside) or locking out (outside) the child
- leaving the child alone or isolated from others
- smacking, shaking, hitting or pushing the child
- restraining the child
- withholding basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, bedding or sleep



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- washing a child's mouth with soap, chilli or similar to punish them for swearing
- biting a child to show that it hurts when they bite another child
- threatening to use any of the above.

An applicant who uses this type of punishment or discipline as part of their regular parenting will be assessed as inappropriate to provide a placement for a child in care.

There are **NO** exceptions to this.

Why it's not OK to hit a child

The use of physical punishment will often unintentionally teach children inappropriate ways of thinking and behaving. It does not teach the child self-discipline. It may instead:

- cause or worsen emotional harm or trauma for the child
- teach the child that the way to deal with problems is to hit someone – you should be showing the child better alternatives to solve problems or situations.
- role model bullying and violent behaviours
- alter the way you feel about the child
- teach the child that you can get your own way by using force.

Communities supports and actively encourages more effective behaviour management strategies to support carers to develop positive techniques and skills to educate children about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Communities encourages carers to seek support and assistance in managing children's behaviours. You can talk to a senior child protection worker – placement services at your local district office or seek support from the Foster Care Association of WA or OurSPACE WA.

Teaching emotional regulation skills is the best long-term solution for managing a child's challenging behaviours related to trauma. Physical punishment is likely to exacerbate emotional dysregulation.

Further information and support

Department of Communities

To find out more about fostering, please visit our website or contact the Department.

- **Web:** www.communities.wa.gov.au
- **Email:** enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au
- **Phone:** 6217 6888 or 1800 176 888 (Free call)

Foster Care Association of WA



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The Foster Care Association of WA (FCAWA) represents and supports carers and their families. The FCAWA can provide phone support, and advocacy and information about foster caring.

- **Web:** www.fcawa.com.au
- **Email:** enquiries@fcawa.com.au
- **Phone:** 9242 4222 or 1800 497 101 (Free call)

OurSPACE WA

OurSPACE WA is a free state-wide counselling, therapeutic consultation and support service for Communities approved foster and family carers where the placement may be under stress and/or at risk of breaking down. The program provides culturally responsive, trauma-informed support to help carers understand and meet the needs of the child.

OurSPACE WA also provides confidential counselling to carers around their own personal issues and stress. You can download the information sheet for carers from the website below.

- **Web:** professionals.childhood.org.au/prosody/2020/11/empowering-carers-with-space/
- **Email:** ourspacewa@childhood.org.au
- **Phone:** 1300 381 581 (Monday to Friday)

[Last updated: June 2021]