



Short break care – Information Sheet

This information sheet is for Department of Communities foster, family and significant other carers who have the full-time primary care for a child in the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO's) care.

Short break care (formerly known as respite care) refers to the provision of planned temporary, short term care for a child in the CEO's care with an approved carer. It is intended to assist you as the child's full-time carer to have a short break from your day-to-day care responsibilities.

Short break care arrangements must be discussed and agreed with your child protection worker. The child's age, views (taking into consideration their age and understanding), abilities, vulnerabilities and best interests will be taken into account when determining short break care arrangements.

Where possible, the child should have continuity of short break carers and they will be included in the child's care team.

Preparing the child for short break care

Below are some tips to help you prepare the child before short break care begins:

- Explain to the child what short break care means, i.e. all adults need to spend time together and it is normal for children to stay with other families they know are safe and fun, like staying at an aunt or uncle's house.
- Reassure the child that you will be there when they come home.
- Provide the child with photographs of the family, the house, any pets, and details about the bedroom they are going to sleep in. This provides a family profile. You should check with your child protection worker before arranging this.
- Encourage the child to talk about any questions, concerns, fears or worries they may have. For example, Do I get a night light? Do I flush the toilet during the night? What if I get hungry?
- Have a conversation with the child to prepare them for their first sleep over. For example, *"You might miss me", "I will miss you", "Remember you can think of me with (transitional item, i.e. a special toy or possession)", "I will be thinking of you while you are away" and "I will look forward to seeing you when you get back."*
- Explain that each family has different rules and it might be hard for them to remember the new rules. Practice with the child as to how they would ask the short break carer if they needed something or were not sure of what was going to happen.



[Short break care – Information Sheet]

- Let the child know what activities they might be doing with the short break carer and their family (if known).

Planning the transition

- The child protection worker will plan the transition with you and the short break carer. A short break support worker or senior child protection worker placement services (whichever is relevant) will provide support. The planning should include:
 - A discussion on the role of everyone involved.
 - Arranging dates for introductions, day visits, and the first sleep over.
 - A discussion on how short break care will be introduced to the child so everyone has a common understanding of the arrangements.
 - Giving contact details to the short break carer and providing relevant medical information about the child should it be required.
 - Establishing how information will be shared and how it will be age appropriately managed with the child.
 - Consideration of the child's emotional age and understanding, travel distance between your home and the short break carer's home, siblings and their care arrangements, timing of short break care, holidays and other commitments.
 - A discussion with the short break carer on how they can maintain consistent parenting strategies to those you use with the child, including consideration of any special needs.
- You should arrange to meet with the short break carer (without the child if possible), or at least have a chat over the phone, to discuss the child's needs such as what foods they like and dislike, bed and bath routine, enjoyable activities, fears, and any medical or special needs. You could write down this information and give it to the short break carer at the first meeting with the child.
- If the child has a preferred name (for example, their birth name is Nicholas but they prefer Nic) make sure to let the short break carer know.
- Once dates of visits and sleepovers are agreed, you can involve the child in putting the details on a calendar and placing it where they can see it (as relevant to their age and understanding).
- You should arrange for the first meeting with the short break carer at your home. The second meeting should be at the short break carer's home with you present (for at least some of the time). Familiarising the child with the short break carer's home before the care arrangement commences will help to reduce their anxiety.



[Short break care – Information Sheet]

- You should encourage the child to share some information about themselves with the short break carer. The child could share a photo album or make a list of their likes and dislikes. The child should ideally come up with their own ideas.
- Encourage the child to take along a special toy or familiar possession to help them with the transition.
- Speak with the short break carer about their family rules and ask them to explain them to the child. The short break carer can also explain what activities they have planned while the child is staying over.

During the stay

- You can leave little notes for the child to find in their bag with positive messages (as appropriate). This is good for children of all ages.
- The child should have the option of a night light (even for older children). Talk with the short break carer about this.
- Suggest that the short break carer not introduce new people to the child too soon. This will enable the child time to establish their new relationships first.
- The child will need to have clear expectations for behaviour and rules should be established from the beginning. However, be conscious of how hard it is for the child to learn new family rules that are different from home. Talk with the short break carer about this.
- You may suggest that the short break carer write down the family rules, including routines such as bath and bed time, and place it on the fridge or somewhere that the child can see it. Ask the short break carer to explain to the child why they have put the rules on the fridge (or elsewhere), i.e. they know how hard it is to learn different house rules and the child could get them mixed up and/or find it hard to ask questions. You might suggest that the short break carer let the child know they can check the rules on the fridge together.
- The child may have some things that they find uncomfortable or difficult, or things they don't like such as being tickled or hugged. You should tell the short break carer and encourage the child to talk to them about such things (as appropriate).
- It is also important to have fun rules such as a family rule of saying nice things to each other at the dinner table or sharing information about the best part of each person's day. You could ask the short break carer to include some of their fun rules on the list.



[Short break care – Information Sheet]

After the stay

- You should check in with the child after each stay to see how it went – be sensitive and use a low key approach. Check to see if they had any worries.
- Respond to the child's questions about what you did while they were away. Reinforce that you will always be there when the child comes home.
- Be conscious that the child may have 'split loyalties' and may play one carer off against the other. You may need to work together with the short break carer to manage this. You can seek advice from your child protection worker.
- Ask the short break carer to provide feedback on how the stay went.
- Share relevant information with your child protection worker, short break care support worker or senior child protection worker placement services (whichever is relevant) and the short break carer.
- If there are any concerns highlighted by the child, discuss this with your child protection worker.
- If there are opinions or matters between you and the short break carer that is in conflict, speak with your child protection worker. Ensure the child is not involved in such conversations between you and the short break carer.
- Check with the child if they would like to include the short break carer and their family in their *My Life Story Book*.

Further information

Contact your child protection worker, short break support worker or senior child protection worker placement services if you need more information.

Contact information

Department of Communities

Telephone: (08) 9222 2555

Country free call: 1800 622 258

Child and Carer Connection Hub – Telephone: 1800 024 453

Web: www.communities.wa.gov.au