



# Looking after yourself as a carer

Your role as a carer is incredibly important to the children you will care for.

As with everything important there may be times when you face challenges you have not previously experienced. There may be behaviours in a child that you have not had to manage before. Please ask for help or guidance from those around you with experience.

Children in out-of-home care have often lived through a range of traumatic childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect. This can influence how they behave, feel and how they see the world. They can sometimes behave in ways that you may find challenging and demanding. They can behave in ways that you and they cannot understand.

As a carer, you are providing these children with a safe and supportive home when they can't live with their family. You may be caring for a child for one night or for many years, depending on the circumstances.

Dealing with the child's complex behaviours and needs (such as medical and/or disability), maintaining contact with their parents and family, helping the child heal from trauma, helping them understand themselves, keeping them connected to their culture and religion, and managing their education and activities are some of the challenges foster carers may face.

It's important to look after yourself while balancing the calm and consistent caring needed to support a child's healing.

## Self-care

Make time for yourself. As a carer you will spend a lot of time caring for others, so you need to take the time to care for yourself as well. Be mindful of your own resilience and sense of hopefulness – these are key to staying strong to support a child in their healing journey.

It may not be possible to take away all the stress but taking steps to look after yourself will help.

Going for a walk or walking the dog, stretching, catching up with friends, participating in community activities, growing your spirituality, reading a book, doing puzzles or watching your favourite show, are some of the things people say help with their self-care.



## Health and wellbeing

- Look after your body – get enough sleep and do some exercise.
- Maintain a healthy diet – and treat yourself from time to time.
- Maintain social contact with friends and relatives.
- Do hobbies or activities that allow you to switch off where possible.
- Do fun activities together with the child and your family.
- Laugh! Remember to keep your sense of humour.
- Take a holistic approach – do something for your mind, body, spirit and culture.
- Connect and be involved in the community – attend community events and festivals.

## Emotional health

- Do something that lifts your spirit and spend time with others who make you feel good.
- Have regular contact with friends and relatives.
- Be a scientist about your own behaviours and self-talk. If either becomes negative about you or the child seek help.
- Talk with your friends, family, or partner. When speaking to other people, be mindful of the confidentiality of the child in care.

## Support and developmental resources

- Reach out and chat with your caseworker or the senior child protection worker - placement services and ask how they can support you. You may wish to discuss a particular issue or seek advice on how to deal with certain behaviours. Your district may also conduct regular get togethers for carers.
- Ask friends or relatives to prepare meals or arrange for home delivery meals from time to time.
- Start a diary that outlines your expectations in this role and discuss this with the case manager. Periodically check in on those expectations for yourself and with the case manager.
- Maintain the diary focusing on your own behaviours and thoughts about the situation not about the child's behaviours. Your thoughts and behaviours can change slowly over time and this is a good way of monitoring your changes.
- Arrange for someone to do household chores or set up a roster. If the child is old enough, get them to be part of the roster to help out with the chores. This will help in building the child's life skills and being part of your family.



- Enquire about professional developmental training or courses to build on knowledge and skills to support you in the carer role. The Department of Communities Learning and Development unit runs ongoing learning activities for carers.
- Find or create your own support network – link in with other carers or join a support group to connect with others who know first-hand the challenges and rewards as a carer. You can seek support from the Foster Care Association of WA.
- Reach out to community, cultural and support networks. These connections may guide and encourage you to help with the child’s healing journey.

## Taking a break and getting respite

- Discuss with the child’s caseworker or senior child protection worker placement services about planning breaks.
- When a child you care for is spending time with their parents or extended family, is away learning about culture, on a school camp or doing other activities, take a break. It’s a good opportunity to refocus and spend time with your supports or for yourself.
- Short break care (respite care) provides you with a ‘break’ from your caring role.

## Meeting your own needs

It’s important for you to maintain your health and wellbeing, particularly in times of stress. To do this, you need to be in touch with your own needs and be clear about how to meet them.

Wellness and self-care are an active, lifelong process of developing self-awareness and making decisions that will help you to live a more balanced and fulfilling life. Wellness will be different depending on your needs, experiences, and circumstances.

Caring for a child who cannot live with their family provides life opportunities and challenges that require you to continually reflect on how you will maintain a balance of wellbeing.

## Further information

### Foster Care Association of Western Australia (FCAWA)

The FCAWA represents and supports carers and their families. The FCAWA provides information about foster caring, phone support, and advocacy for carers.

Newly approved Department of Communities foster and family carers are eligible to one year free membership to the FCAWA. You can find some helpful resources and information about various social activities run by the FCAWA and other agencies on their website.

- **Web:** [www.fcawa.com.au](http://www.fcawa.com.au)
- **Email:** [enquiries@fcawa.com.au](mailto:enquiries@fcawa.com.au)



- **Phone:** 9242 4222 or 1800 497 101 (Free call)

### **Department of Communities**

You can find information about learning and development workshops and foster carer resources on our website or speak with your caseworker.

- **Web:** [www.communities.wa.gov.au](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au)
- **Email:** [enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au)
- **Phone:** 6217 6888 or 1800 176 888 (free call)

### **OurSPACE WA**

OurSPACE WA is a free State-wide counselling, therapeutic consultation and support service for Department of Communities 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 you 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:** <https://professionals.childhood.org.au/prosody/2020/11/empowering-carers-with-space/>
- **Email:** [ourspacewa@childhood.org.au](mailto:ourspacewa@childhood.org.au)
- **Phone:** 1300 381 581 (Monday to Friday)

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