



Australian Foster Care Association

Policy and Position Statement

on

Long Term Stability in Foster Care

2005

For Foster, Relative and  
Kinship Care Across Australia

# Long Term Stability in Foster Care

**Position:**

Children and young people in the care of the State have a right to return to the care of their family where this is safe and appropriate. Where this cannot be achieved within a reasonable time period, they have a right to secure, continuous, long-term care where they can achieve stability and have the best possible chance to grow into happy, mature, responsible adults.

**Commentary:**

The Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) membership consists of representatives of the recognised Foster Care Associations of each State and Territory. The above statement represents the position of AFCA as at 1 January 2005. This is not meant to be an exhaustive statement but rather covers the major issues raised by foster carers in relation to permanency or long-term stability. The statement has been produced to encourage:

- Quality outcomes for children and young people in care;
- Satisfying partnerships between relative carers and workers; and
- Consistency across the nation.

**Definition:**

Many children and young people entering the care system often drift with decisions made only about their short-term care. Permanency or long-term stability for children and young people in care has an impact on the identity of the child or young person. It is one of the most significantly important variables in the success and ongoing stability of placement for a child entering the care system from a young age. Decisions about stability are made in a variety of ways across the country.

**Acknowledgements:**

1. The decision for a child or young person to remain in care in the long-term is a serious one, but nonetheless one that needs to be made so that planning with direction can occur.
2. The focus of the decision to place a child or young person in long-term care must be focussed on the child, not the biological parents. Wherever possible and developmentally appropriate, the children or young people should be involved in decision making about their care.
3. Decisions such as that for a child or young person to remain in care long-term should not be made by front line workers but by senior staff. Following such a decision, the role of front line staff would be to consistently implement the plan of stability.
4. Governments should have the right to step in and remove the decision making power from parents where this is necessary to ensure the long-term stability of a child or young person.
5. The needs of foster carers and children or young people in care are best met in a system that clearly differentiates the provision of short-term care and long-term care.

**Issues:**

Efforts for the reconnection of children or young people with their families should occur at an intensive level from when the child or young person is taken into care. If progress is occurring, then efforts for reunification should continue. When progress is not acceptable and reunification cannot occur, a decision must be made on a stable, long-term placement. If a second or subsequent child is taken into care from the same family, decisions on reunification or long-term care should be fast tracked.

1. Once a decision for long-term care has been made, careful selection of the foster carers must be undertaken to ensure the needs of the child or young person are matched to the strengths of the carer. (Carers include foster carers, relative carers, guardians and adoptive parents.)
2. Where foster carers are designated short-term or long-term care providers, consideration should be given to continuing the current placement and altering the status of the foster carer should this be an option supported by all parties.
3. Contact between the child or young person in long-term care and their family should be encouraged and arranged between the carer and the parent wherever possible but needs to be in the best interests of the child. Consideration needs to be given to the frequency and type of contact given the long-term nature of the placement and the goal of stability for the child or young person.
4. Long-term care should be supported financially in the same way as other care placements.
5. Worker support should be available to the carer and child or young person when needed.
6. At all times, young people in care, and where appropriate, children, should be consulted about their placement including any discussion of reunification.