



Respite Policy

1. Purpose

Respite plays an essential role in maintaining the wellbeing and stability of family based placements. This policy outlines how the Department for Child Protection (DCP) provides respite services to children and young people who are cared for by foster, kinship, or specific child only carers (SCO), under the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#) (CYPS Act). It also standardises how respite is managed and approved, so that carers and support agencies receive reliable information and support.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all DCP staff who work directly with carers, as well as staff involved in the administration of respite, the management of respite contracts, and the coordination and support of respite placements.

The policy governs formal respite arrangements for children and young people placed with family-based carers under the [CYPS Act](#) but excludes those under Long-term Guardianship (Specified Person) (LTGSP).

This policy does not apply to emergency placements or short-term alternative care arrangements that may incidentally provide a break for carers. Excluded arrangements include informal care provided by relatives or friends, babysitting, sleepovers, school camps, holiday programs, and formal paid child care services.

3. Authority

3.1 Legislative context

- Requirements for approved carers are governed by Part 1, Chapter 7 of the [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#).
- The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle](#) (ATSICPP) must be considered when arranging respite for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Section 12(3) of the [CYPS Act](#) requires DCP to consult with and have regard to any submissions of a recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation (ACCO) before placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person. The placement principle applies regardless of whether the circumstances occur wholly or partly outside South Australia.

3.2 Whole of Government requirements

This policy aligns with [Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children](#), which promotes child-centred, culturally safe, and trauma-informed care and the [Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023–2026 \(ATSI First Action Plan\)](#), which sets out national priorities for improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

3.3 DCP requirements

- [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#)
- [Statement of Commitment](#)
- [Our Way Forward](#)
- [DCP Practice Approach](#)
- [DCP Practice Principles](#)



- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#)
- [Culturally and linguistically diverse placement Policy](#)
- [Working with cultural diversity Practice Paper](#)
- [Carer Support Payments \(Family Based\) Procedure](#)
- [Carer Support Payments Who Pays for What](#)
- [Who Can Say OK?](#)

3.4 Principles

This policy is underpinned by DCP's Practice Approach, which promotes child-centred, culturally safe, and trauma-informed care through key practice principles:

- Respite services prioritise the safety, wellbeing, and perspectives of children and young people, ensuring that their needs and preferences guide planning and decision-making.
- Respite offers short-term support designed to promote family and placement stability, furthering the overarching objective of maintaining secure connections between children, their families, and communities.
- Respite provides carers with planned periods of relief, supporting their ability to consistently deliver safe, nurturing care.
- Respite arrangements uphold the ATSI CPP and ensure culturally safe practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. These arrangements also address the cultural requirements of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- Respite is organised in close cooperation with children, families, carers, case managers, and service providers to ensure alignment with case plan objectives and to enhance placement stability.

4. Policy requirements

Respite is defined as a formal arrangement in which a child or young person spends brief, planned, regular, or occasional periods of time with a DCP approved carer other than their primary caregiver.

4.1 Purpose of respite

Respite has a range of purposes. For children and young people, respite can:

- strengthen relationships with important people
- broaden their carer and support network
- support and maintain sibling contact
- provide opportunities for new and positive experiences.

Respite also supports carers by providing planned periods of temporary relief. This helps carers maintain their capacity to provide safe, stable and nurturing care, particularly in placements with higher or more complex needs, and supports placement quality and longevity over time.

4.1.1 Distinction between respite and shared care

Respite is intended to provide short-term, planned or occasional support to promote placement stability. It is not intended to operate as an ongoing arrangement in which care is routinely shared between carers.

Where respite is provided occasionally or intermittently, including where respite periods occur close together, the arrangement may continue to be managed as respite where this remains consistent with the child or young person's case plan.



Where a pattern of frequent or regular respite over a prolonged period emerges (for example, recurring weekly respite over several weeks or months), the DCP case worker must review the care arrangement to determine whether it continues to meet the definition of respite or whether a shared care arrangement is more appropriate.

A shared care arrangement exists when care is routinely divided between carers in accordance with an agreed schedule. In these circumstances the:

- existing placement must be reviewed and, where appropriate, replaced with a shared care placement record; and
- care arrangement must be formally documented, including overnight care arrangements.

There is no fixed minimum interval required between respite occasions. However, repeated or patterned respite should prompt review to ensure the placement type recorded accurately reflects the care arrangement being provided.

4.2 Use of respite

Carers' respite needs vary depending on individual circumstances, the needs of the child or young person, and the availability of informal and formal support networks. The frequency and duration of respite must be determined through assessment of the carer's situation and the best interests of the child or young person, and should remain consistent with the child or young person's case plan.

Carers are eligible for up to **24 occasions of respite within a calendar year**.

An occasion of respite may include:

- **day respite**, commencing and concluding on the same calendar date
- **overnight respite**, spanning at least one night and ending on a subsequent date
- **multiple consecutive nights**, up to a maximum of 21 nights.

Respite periods exceeding **21 consecutive nights** are classified as short-term placements and fall outside the definition of respite under this policy. Respite may occur either in the home of the respite carer or at the primary carer's residence, regardless of whether the primary carer is present.

4.3 Using other informal and formal child care options

DCP case workers are expected to work collaboratively with carers and support workers to identify and facilitate appropriate informal and formal child care options that can support carers to take planned breaks. These options may also complement formal respite arrangements and, where appropriate, provide children and young people with safe and enriching experiences outside their primary care setting.

Alternatives to formal respite include:

- child care or Family Day Care
- Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)
- babysitting services
- unpaid care provided by extended family members or friends
- school camps and holiday programs
- NDIS-funded supports, where included in the child or young person's NDIS plan.

Carers may be eligible to access Flexible Respite support payments to contribute to the cost of these informal and formal child care options. Carers are responsible for meeting any costs not covered through available DCP supports. For further guidance about entitlements and cost responsibilities, refer to the [Carer Support Payments Who Pays for What?](#) and the [Carer Support Payments \(Family Based\) Procedure](#).



For information about approval processes for informal child care options, refer to [Who Can Say OK?](#) Guidance regarding accessing formal child care services, including OSHC, is available in the [Support the child to attend child care](#) section of the Manual of Practice.

4.4 Eligibility criteria

Respite is offered to approved foster, kinship, and temporary carers looking after children under short or long-term placements. It applies to all children and young people in the Chief Executive's guardianship, including those under Voluntary Custody Agreements. Respite does not apply to shared care, LTGSP, or residential care placements. Primary carers are eligible for respite three months after a placement begins.

4.4.1 Respite within the first three months of placement

In some circumstances, respite may be required within the first three months of a placement. This may occur where the child or young person has high or complex needs, or where the primary carer has pre-existing commitments that require additional support during the establishment of the placement.

Early respite may assist to stabilise and sustain the placement by supporting both the child or young person and the primary carer during the initial adjustment period.

Any respite period proposed within the first three months of a placement, or any additional respite, must be approved by the DCP case worker's supervisor. Approval must be obtained prior to the respite occurring and formally recorded in the respite placement request documentation.

4.5 Planned respite

Requests for planned respite must meet the following criteria:

Child centred	The safety of the child or young person is the paramount consideration. All decisions should prioritise their best interests, ensure their perspectives are incorporated, and protect their rights. Respite arrangements must be tailored to meet the individual needs of each child or young person, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people with disability or complex needs, and those from CALD backgrounds.
Continuity of care	Respite care should be provided by a carer familiar to the child or young person, and ideally from the same household whenever possible.
Respite is regular and planned	Scheduled and structured respite arrangements provide children, young people, and their carers with consistency in daily routines and foster a stable, predictable environment.
Respite is consistent with the child or young person's case plan	Regularly scheduled respite is an integral component of established strategies designed to support placement stability. Respite should offer children and young people constructive experiences and opportunities to build positive relationships.

4.6 Emergency respite

Emergency respite may be approved in urgent circumstances (such as sudden illness or personal emergencies).

Emergency respite cannot be used after a placement breakdown. In these circumstances the DCP case worker should request an emergency placement from Placement Services.

4.7 Respite carer responsibilities



Respite carers are approved carers who provide temporary care for children and young people placed with family-based carers. Their key responsibilities during respite placements include:

- delivering safe, nurturing, and culturally appropriate care in accordance with each child or young person's case plan
- maintaining established routines and supporting the wellbeing of the child or young person, including (but not limited to, ensuring they attend school, keep scheduled health appointments, and continue participating in social, cultural and recreational and community activities
- communicating effectively with the primary carer and DCP case worker, as required, to ensure continuity and consistency of care
- reporting incidents, concerns, or significant changes in the child or young person's behaviour to the DCP case worker in a timely manner
- maintaining confidentiality regarding the child or young person and their family.

DCP works in partnership with service providers to ensure respite carers are well-informed about the purpose of respite care, the child or young person's needs, and all relevant legislative and policy requirements.

4.8 Respite requests

Respite requests are managed and approved by Placement Services. DCP case workers must submit planned respite requests **at least two business days** before the intended start date.

Urgent respite requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Placement Services supervisor.

DCP case workers are responsible for informing carers when a respite request is assessed unsuitable or cannot be accommodated.

4.9 Respite for specific groups

4.9.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Active efforts must be undertaken when planning and approving respite placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, in accordance with the [ATSICPP](#).

Active efforts extend across all stages of respite planning and decision-making and may include, but are not limited to:

- consulting with a recognised ACCO in accordance with legislative requirements
- actively identifying potential respite carers from within the child or young person's family, kinship group and/or community
- engaging family members, kin and relevant community supports in respite planning and decision-making, where appropriate
- considering how respite arrangements can support and strengthen the child or young person's cultural identity, connections to family, kin, community and Country
- supporting opportunities for sibling and family contact through respite placements.

DCP case workers must ensure that consultation and active efforts are meaningful, timely and clearly documented as part of the respite placement process.

A Principal Aboriginal Consultant may be consulted to provide advice and guidance about the application of the ATSICPP in respite planning, including advice regarding culturally appropriate respite options, supporting cultural identity development through respite, and exploring opportunities for sibling, family or kin contact.

For further guidance, refer to [Consult with a recognised organisation \(for Aboriginal children and young people\)](#) in the 'Place a child or young person in care' chapter of the Manual of Practice and the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#).



4.9.2 Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Respite for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds must be planned, approved, and delivered in accordance with the [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Child Placement Policy](#). It is recommended that the DCP case worker to consult with DCP Multicultural Services or the Practice Leader, Multicultural Services, prior to placing a child or young person from a CALD background, to ensure that placement decisions are made with consideration for cultural safety.

Consultation with DCP Multicultural Services may provide guidance about culturally responsive respite options, ways to support cultural identity through respite care, and consideration of sibling, family, or kinship contact.

For further guidance, refer to the [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Child Placement Policy](#) and the [Working with cultural diversity Practice Paper](#).

4.9.3 Children and young people with disability

The NDIS is responsible for funding respite support where it is required because of the functional impacts of the child or young person's disability. The DCP case worker is responsible for ensuring access to, and implementation of, appropriate NDIS funded supports.

DCP or DCP funded services are responsible for respite that supports a child or young person's placement. Carers of children and young people with disability can request respite through their DCP case worker or NGO support in the same way as other carers.

NDIS respite supports and DCP respite supports can be provided at the same time. If respite supports are included in the child or young person's NDIS plan, these can be accessed in addition to respite supports that are funded and/or provided by DCP or DCP funded agencies.

For further information, refer to [Identify and respond to the child or young person's disability needs](#) in the Supporting children and young people in care chapter of the Manual of Practice.

4.9.4 Children and young people in specialist placements

Respite placements for children and young people in specialist foster care should be equipped to support each child or young person's needs. Respite carers are expected to possess the necessary skills and have completed all required specialist training to meet these needs.

4.9.5 Children and young people in kinship and SCO care

Kinship and SCO carers have the same rights to respite as foster carers. To find suitable respite carers, use family scoping and mapping methods to consider individuals already known to the child and young person or their main carer. When assessing and approving respite carers from the networks of the child, young person, or carer, this process should run parallel to assessing primary carers. Temporary placements must not be arranged solely to provide respite care.

5. Compliance, monitoring and evaluation

Responsibility for compliance, monitoring and evaluation sits across various areas in relation to their respective functions in relation to casework practice, contracting, placement services and carer payments.



6. Related documents

Related documents, forms and templates
Manual of Practice: Consult with a recognised organisation (for Aboriginal children and young people)
Manual of Practice: Support the child to attend child care
Manual of Practice: Identify and respond to the child or young person's disability needs
Manual of Practice: Supporting children and young people in care
Strategic Plan 2022-2026
Our Way Forward
DCP Practice Principles
Statement of Commitment
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Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023–2026 (ATSI First Action Plan)
Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017



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