



Reunification for children and young people Practice Paper

1. Introduction

This practice paper provides Department for Child Protection (DCP) workers, including DCP case workers and DCP psychologists, with important information about the family reunification process and associated practice considerations.

Family reunification is the planned process of safely reuniting a child or young person with their family after a period in care. It is a complex process requiring assessment, case work and service coordination to meet the child or young person's needs while also supporting parents or caregivers to address the child protection concerns in a timely manner. Decisions about reunification viability and progress must be informed by continuous assessment, underpinned by the [DCP Assessment Framework](#), the [SDM® Family Reunification Assessment](#) and professional judgement.

For further guidance regarding reunification, refer to [Undertake family reunification](#) in the [Ongoing intervention](#) chapter of the Manual of Practice. The [Change theory Practice Paper](#), [Permanency planning Practice Paper](#), [Attachment Practice Paper](#) and [Family contact for children and young people Practice Paper](#) are also of particular relevance to reunification.

2. The complexities of reunification

Reunification involves more than just returning a child or young person to the care of their parent/s. Rather than a “one-time event”, reunification is a “process involving the reintegration of the child into a family environment that may have changed significantly from the environment the child left” (Wulczyn, 2004, p. 99).

Reunification work involves a continuum of practice that is focused on the needs of children and young people, both in care and after they return home, for safety, health and wellbeing, family and cultural connections and continuity of education and other activities.

The reunification process is complex, challenging and dynamic, requiring families to address issues that are often entrenched and intergenerational, within a relatively short timeframe. There is no formula or ‘one size fits all’ approach for achieving reunification. Case workers must adapt their practice in accordance with the individual needs and circumstances of each child or young person and family.

Effective reunification relies on:

- strong and meaningful engagement with the family
- comprehensive and ongoing assessment





DCP Practice Approach

- a robust safety and support network for children and young people.

Balancing the responsibilities associated with assessing and supporting parents can be particularly challenging for workers, requiring “sophisticated casework skills” (Collings, McLaine, Ciftci & Luu, 2024, p. 7867) alongside a focus on relationship building and rigour in assessment.

DCP case workers must undertake rigorous assessment of reunification viability while also engaging with parent/s and supporting them to address child protection concerns. In the case of multiple siblings living in different placements, active reunification efforts may need to be undertaken with multiple parents/caregivers. Case workers must also consider, and plan for, the possibility that reunification may be assessed as unviable.

Distance, travel and service availability can add further complexity for reunification in regional and remote areas. This does not mean that reunification should not be considered as an option. Communities in regional and remote areas may be more likely to support each other, therefore, efforts to wrap family and community supports around the extended family (through [Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal Families](#), for example) can effectively support successful reunification outcomes.

It is critical for DCP case workers to connect with other service providers, community leaders, and extended family to carefully consider the need for information sharing to support the reunification process.

Refer to the [Relationship based practice Practice Paper](#) and [Bias in Child Protection practice Practice Paper](#) for further guidance.

2.1 Factors associated with effective reunification

Research has found a range of factors that are related with ‘success’ in reunification; these reflect evidence regarding factors associated with children and young people's re-entry into care. For example, length of time in care prior to reunification is consistently identified as a predictive factor for child protection reinvolvement (Tucker et al., 2025, p. 8). However, rather than “markers flagging high-risk groups for potential reinvolvement”, reference to these factors directs attention towards areas in which “practical and meaningful supports for permanence and strengthening of protective family factors” (Tucker et al., 2025, p. 11) are needed.

Tucker et al. (2025, pp. 8-9) highlight a range of factors indicative of the multiple and complex needs of families and the increased need for intensive multidisciplinary/multiagency support services:

- child-related factors -
 - removal at infancy
 - intellectual and/or physical disability
 - behavioural challenges
 - culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- family-related factors -
 - parental substance abuse
 - limitations in child development knowledge and parenting skills
 - child removal due to neglect
 - poverty





DCP Practice Approach

- lack of social support
- domestic and family violence
- practice-level factors -
 - rapid or extended time in out-of-home care
 - non-kin care placements
 - placement instability
 - previous child protection involvement
 - failure to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities in decision making processes.

Practices that may support successful reunification include:

- establishing and working with a care team involving the child or young person, their parent/s and all relevant key supports. This promotes effective information sharing, enables progress towards case plan goals to be monitored and appropriate action/s to be taken
- supporting stability of care for the child or young person by striving to avoid significant placement changes, including by ensuring prompt decision-making and comprehensive scoping of kinship networks
- taking steps to actively and meaningfully engage with children and young people and their parents on an ongoing basis
- identifying parental needs and ensuring an early service response with the appropriate agency
- considering and mobilising informal supports and contacts (such as sporting clubs, faith-based connections or community groups)
- integrating the [Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal families Framework](#) during all stages of reunification
- applying all elements of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#) (prevention, participation, placement, partnership, connection, and the precursor identity). Refer to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#) for further guidance
- applying the [CALD child placement Policy](#) when working with children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to ensure that cultural identity, language, traditions, and community connections are preserved and respected, and the child's sense of belonging, identity, and wellbeing are supported.

For further guidance, refer to [Work in partnership with the child or young person's care team](#) under Support the placement in the Supporting children and young people in care chapter of the Manual of Practice, and Provide case management services to support the reunification under [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice.

3. Children and young people's experiences of reunification

Reunification can be a particularly challenging and complex experience for children and young people. Children and young people who have experienced trauma live in uncertainty while they wait for their parents or caregivers to achieve change. They may feel anxious about their own safety if reunified and concerned about the wellbeing of their parents, siblings, and/or pets in the meantime.

The prospect of reunification can generate a sense of internal conflict for children and young people who may experience "divided feelings of loyalty" between their carers and their birth family (Venables et al.,





DCP Practice Approach

2025, p. 10). They may also fear, and experience distress in anticipation of the possible loss of their relationship with their carer and the carer’s family.

Arney et al. (2015) argue that experiences of separation and reunification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are often compounded by disconnection from family, community, and culture. The loss of cultural identity and belonging can contribute to grief, confusion, and a sense of displacement extending beyond the immediate family relationship.

Separation from kin and Country disrupts the transmission of language, stories, and cultural knowledge which is central to wellbeing and identity (Arney et al., 2015). Reunification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people must therefore consider cultural continuity and identity as well as safety and stability.

Restoring connections to extended family, community and cultural practices is vital for healing and belonging. This aligns the connection and participation elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which emphasise that maintaining children’s relationships with family, community, culture, and Country is fundamental to their best interests (SNAICC, 2023).

Moore et al’s (2020) research with child protection-involved children and young people highlighted the significance of unexpected changes to the home environment for reunification. Transitions can be challenging for all involved and it is crucial that these are well considered and child centred. Children and young people who are adjusting to being back at home may need help to “reconcile their family relationships and find new ways of interacting with parents and siblings” (p. 10). Additionally, some young people reported that their families held them responsible for child protection intervention, resulting in strained relationships and feelings of shame and guilt. Other issues related to unresolved trauma (including “big feelings” and coping difficulties) and challenges at school, and in friendships and relationships (p. 11).

When asked what they “wanted and needed” for reunification, children and young people talked about options and choices (for example, whether and how they would return home) and planning and preparation (for example, supporting them to “be ready” for their return home). Refer to Plan and implement reunification transitions under [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing Intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice.

Moore et al (2020, p. 12) conclude that children and young people can be supported to reunify by:

- ensuring a focus on children and young people’s expectations including “whether, when and how” they want to reunify
- considering how children and young people might best be “prepared and equipped to return to families that might have changed”
- considering how trauma and separation have affected the child or young person and ensuring availability of adequate supports to help them recover. This should include access to supports that can help with reconciling relationships.

Return to Country trips to reintegrate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people with their communities and allow them to spend time with immediate and extended family are also critical.

Children and young people who are feeling anxious and uncertain may demonstrate emotional and behavioural difficulties during the reunification process. Thus, some children and young people – and/or





their carers – may benefit from therapeutic support at this time. For further guidance refer to '[Identify and respond to the psychological and emotional needs of the child and young person](#)' in the Manual of Practice.

[Child centred](#) practice is especially important to all aspects of reunification planning and decision making. Engaging with children and young people about their perspectives on reunification, and actively promoting their participation in discussions and decision-making, is critical. Where children and young people are unable to verbalise their views, due to their developmental abilities, disability or fear and confusion, careful attention must instead be given to emotional and behavioural forms of expression. Refer to the [Supporting the participation of children and young people in decision making Practice Paper](#) and [Relationship based practice Practice Paper](#) for further guidance.

4. Assessment for reunification

Early assessment provides the foundation for case conceptualisation, decision making and case planning. It contributes to permanency planning and ensures that child protection concerns, family strengths and children or young people's needs are identified and taken into consideration.

Comprehensive assessment clarifies:

- what – and who - should be the focus for reunification efforts
- whether reunification efforts will focus on one or more child or young person (where there are multiple siblings in a family)
- timeframes for achieving change
- how progress will be assessed across the period of intervention
- what degree of change will be sufficient to address the child protection concerns (including consideration of what the required change might 'look' like).

The [DCP Assessment Framework](#) provides detailed guidance for assessing the viability of reunification, including indicators and contra-indicators for reunification. Exploration of all [domains of assessment of reunification viability](#) is essential for a comprehensive assessment.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, assessment for reunification must include a focus on cultural identity, connection, and belonging as essential components of safety and wellbeing. Assessments should both explore the child or young person's relationships with family, community and Country, and identify opportunities for strengthening these connections throughout the reunification process. Cultural safety cannot be separated from physical and emotional safety, hence, reunification planning must demonstrate how cultural continuity will be maintained or restored.

Consultation with Aboriginal staff, Elders, family, and relevant community members is critical to ensure assessments are culturally informed, respectful, and aligned with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This includes consideration of the connection, prevention, and participation elements which support children and young people's right to maintain cultural identity and relationships.

For further guidance, refer to Assess and respond to the child or young person's needs in the context of reunification and Review progress and assess evidence of change in [Undertake family reunification](#) and [Continually assess, develop a case conceptualisation and decide case direction](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice.





DCP Practice Approach

5. Decision-making for reunification

Decisions about reunification for children and young people have significant long-term ramifications. Proceeding with reunification prematurely or when safety cannot be assured places the child or young person at significant risk of further harm. Thus, the risks and benefits of reunification should be carefully considered for each child and young person.

The timeframes for decision-making about the viability of reunification are set out in [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice. Recognising children and young people's need for stability and certainty, decisions about the viability of reunification should be made as soon as possible: within six months for infants who enter care before the age of two years and within 12 months for children and young people older than two years. Decisions about family contact arrangements must also be made and reviewed on a regular basis. Refer to the [Family contact for children and young people Practice Paper](#) for more information.

All reunification decision-making should be recorded, including decisions about viability, and a clear rationale and/or evidence provided. Refer to the [Consult or decision record Procedure](#) and Record a decision about whether to proceed with reunification and Plan and implement reunification transitions (where reunification is proceeding) under [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice.

Decisions about reunification for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people must be grounded in self-determination and cultural authority and made in partnership with families and communities as well as Aboriginal DCP staff. This ensures that cultural perspectives and obligations are properly understood and respected. Decision-making should consider the child or young person's cultural identity, relationships, and connection to Country, recognising that cultural safety is inseparable from physical and emotional safety (Arney et al., 2015).

The involvement of a Principal Aboriginal Consultant, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and/or relevant Elders supports culturally informed and self-determined decision-making, reflecting the participation and connection elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This ensures that reunification decisions respect the child or young person's right to remain connected to their culture, kin, and community, reflect their cultural needs and uphold the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (SNAICC, 2023). Consultation with family, kinship networks, and community Elders is essential to ensure decisions, particularly the elements of connection, participation, and prevention.

Consultation with practice leaders, Principal Aboriginal Consultants, the DCP Multicultural Services Team and/or psychologists is important to support the reunification decision making process. Regular reviews must also be undertaken, via the Reunification Court process and/or care team meetings, to monitor and acknowledge progress.

Child-centredness is a key consideration throughout reunification. As a [DCP Practice Principle, child-centred practice](#) requires that children and young people are actively supported to participate in decision making, including regarding the potential for reunification. Refer to the [Supporting the participation of children and young people in decision making Practice Paper](#) for further information.





DCP Practice Approach

Further guidance is provided in [Develop the case plan](#) and [Review the case plan](#) in the Case planning, review and annual review chapter of the Manual of Practice.

5.1 Balancing permanency and connection

Permanency planning and timeliness are strongly emphasised in the reunification context (refer to [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice). This recognises that children and young people cannot wait indefinitely for their parents to achieve change and that disrupting healthy attachment relationships (with carers) can have significant, long-term consequences.

The “attachment theory-based presumption” (Hermeston, 2023, p. 361) embedded in dominant conceptualisations of permanency is also important to recognise. This acknowledges that, because permanency planning models commonly reflect Western assumptions about family structure and child needs, the validity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of belonging, in which identity and safety are grounded in *collective* rather than *individual* relationships, are often overlooked. Thus, for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, permanency is not limited to a single household but, rather, is found in a “broader communal sense of belonging; a stable sense of identity, where [children are] from, and their place in relation to family, mob, community, land and culture” (SNAICC, 2016, p.7).

An openness to looking beyond the dyadic model of attachment is therefore critical for DCP workers, to consider the “broader importance of multiple attachment relationships for children, and the significant importance of extended family and kinship networks for children” (McLean, 2016, p. 6). Relatedly, applying an Aboriginal lens to dominant notions of permanency highlights continuity of cultural identity, kinship connection, and relationship to Country as central determinants of wellbeing. When these are disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experience deep cultural loss, disconnection, and identity distress, even when their material needs are met. This recognises that attending to cultural and community relationships is fundamental for the reunification of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Consultation with a Principal Aboriginal Consultant must occur and is essential for ensuring culturally appropriate approaches to reunification.

6. Supporting the reunification process

6.1 Transition support

Families involved in reunification may experience “complex social, emotional, financial, and cultural challenges”, alongside their own “extensive trauma histories” (Tucker et al., 2025, p. 1). For many families, the post-reunification period is marked by significant demands relating to adjustment including the re-establishment of relationships and navigation of “new approaches to familial functioning” (Tucker et al., 2025, p. 3). It must also be acknowledged that the making and sustaining of long-term change for parents and families occurs within the context of ongoing and persistent challenges and “newly developed trauma” including that associated with removal and separation. Thus, it is critical that the reunification process





DCP Practice Approach

centres on identifying, understanding and putting in place the supports that families need to succeed (Lawrie, 2024, p. 23).

Post-reunification support for families is crucial for sustained change and reunification success. Significant elements of post-reunification work include continuing contact and home-visiting, non-judgmental and respectful listening, family advocacy, ongoing education and guidance, and access to practical, meaningful and multidisciplinary supports (Tucker et al, 2025; Prasad & Connolly, 2023; Wulczyn, 2004). Recognising and addressing the family challenges and “experiences of trauma leading up to, because of, and following removal and subsequent reunification” (Tucker et al, 2025, p. 11) is especially critical to effective reunification. This requires that DCP case workers prioritise “practical and meaningful supports” that both respond to the “unique context of individual families and their needs” and focus on strengthening protective family factors (Tucker et al, 2025, p. 11).

Evidence confirming the importance of the relationship between parents and workers highlights the potential for DCP case workers to influence reunification outcomes. For example, the “fostering of positive relationships”, through “trust, mutual respect and negotiated guidance” has been identified as the “cornerstone of effective reunification practices” (Fernandez & Lee, 2013, p.1382; Fernandez, 2012). Worker qualities including “non-judgmental and respectful listening, ongoing empowerment through clear expectations and family advocacy, and continual education and guidance” (Tucker et al, 2025, p. 9), have also been found to support reunification.

6.2 Parents and families

Achieving and sustaining change, in relation to often long-standing issues, is a significant challenge for parents. Attendance at multiple appointments in addition to family contact visits and the management of issues such as transport or housing, makes this a highly demanding time for parents, both emotionally and practically. It is important, when assessing the viability of reunification, that expectations of parents are realistic and DCP case plan goals achievable within the set timeframe. Further guidance regarding the process of change for families is provided in the [Change theory Practice Paper](#).

6.3 Carers

Carers play a vital role in facilitating family connections and supporting children and young people - and their families - through the reunification process. Research confirms that the relationship between carers and parents is crucial to reunification success. For example, carers can model parenting skills and support parents to develop strategies for responding to their children (Fernandez & Lee, 2013, p. 1382). Carers can also play a key role in contributing to ongoing assessment and the early identification of any safety concerns.

Many carers experience unique challenges, not only in caring for children and young people going through difficult times, but as they too live with uncertainty. For example, carers and their families may worry about the future of their relationship with the child or young person and/or be unable to plan beyond the immediate future as they await decisions.

Ensuring that carers are supported by a foster or kinship care support worker as well as the DCP case worker can assist carers to navigate the reunification process and to best support the children and young people in





DCP Practice Approach

their care when challenges arise. Carers should also be made aware of and encouraged to access available supports, training and guidance.

DCP case workers should prioritise regular communication with carers about the progress of reunification and related decision-making. Ensuring DCP, parents and carers work collaboratively and in partnership best supports the reunification process. For further guidance, refer to [Support the placement](#) in the Supporting children and young people in care chapter of the Manual of Practice.

6.3.1 Kinship carers

Kinship carers may need different supports to foster carers due to their, often, different entries into care provision. For example, their decision to become a carer may have been made quickly in response to, and under pressure from, a stressful family crisis. Kinship carers may have no previous child protection involvement nor training in caring for children and young people who have experienced trauma.

Kinship carers may experience additional challenges such as pressure from the child or young person's parents or other family members to allow additional family contact without DCP's oversight. The decision to provide care might also lead to long term ruptures in family relationships, impacting directly on the kinship carer and causing conflict in the family. A care team approach as well as regular support from the kinship care support worker are essential for enabling kinship carers to manage these pressures while providing trauma-informed care.

6.3.2 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander carers

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander infants, children and young people, the involvement of kinship carers holds cultural significance. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship care is grounded in extended family and community networks that keep children connected to their culture, identity and Country. Supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship carers requires recognition of their cultural authority and the relational obligations that accompany caregiving within kinship systems.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship carers may face distinct pressures, including those associated with:

- navigating family expectations
- managing complex community dynamics
- balancing cultural responsibilities with statutory requirements.

Reunification planning must acknowledge these dynamics and ensure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship carers have access to culturally safe, community-led support including - where possible - an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. Collaboration grounded in respect, shared decision-making, and cultural safety is essential for sustaining relationships and promoting the child or young person's sense of belonging and identity.

The end of a child or young person's placement can bring about a mix of complex emotions for carers, especially if this has been a long-term arrangement. Carers may experience grief, sadness, relief, guilt and shock as well as considerable anxiety concerning the child or young person's safety and wellbeing. Carers should be offered support when the placement ends including to explore the potential to pursue an ongoing relationship with the child or young person.





DCP Practice Approach

6.4 Residential care and carers

Residential care staff hold critical information about children and young people’s needs and views and should be involved in case planning and reunification review meetings. They may also be assigned case plan actions, including providing transport for and facilitating family contact.

Residential care staff should be regularly updated on reunification progress. Any changes to reunification plans (such as an increase or decrease in family contact or a change in case direction) should be communicated to the residential care team before being shared with the child or young person.

A care team approach must be taken to ensure children and young people are appropriately supported by both their DCP case worker and residential care staff. For further guidance, refer to [Support children and young people in residential care](#) and [Support placement transitions from residential care](#) in the DCP Residential Care chapter of the Manual of Practice.

7. Considerations for reunification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families must be approached with recognition of the historical and ongoing significance of colonisation and associated intergenerational trauma and mistrust of statutory systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are overrepresented in the child protection system and of these, many are disconnected from their culture, a disconnection that is further exacerbated for those in residential care (Lawrie, 2024, p. 23). Loss of cultural identity undermines an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child or young person’s sense of belonging to their future cultural roles, interrupting the “transmission of intergenerational knowledge and the continuity of culture” (Lawrie, 2024, p. 118).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parenting practices are relational and guided by collective responsibility, kinship, and belonging. Reunification work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families must recognise that change and healing is not reducible to individual efforts but, rather, takes place within a collective and cultural context. Moreover, reunification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families extends beyond the physical return, encompassing healing relationships, reclaiming identity, and restoring belonging, with success measured by the presence of connection, cultural safety, and community inclusion. Thus, strengthening connection to kin, community, and culture is both a protective factor - fundamental to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people - and a precondition for sustained reunification success (Lawrie, 2024; SNAICC, 2023).

Supporting regular and meaningful contact with family, kin and community members, including by facilitating return to Country, is a key responsibility for DCP case workers. In addition, family and community involvement in decision-making promotes successful reunification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, reflecting that the safety of children and young people is a community and family, not just a parental, obligation in Aboriginal Culture. For example, bringing together families, kinship networks, Elders, and Principal Aboriginal Consultants is important for ensuring that interventions are culturally informed, strengths-based, and grounded in Aboriginal worldviews of parenting and child rearing.





DCP Practice Approach

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) is central to reunification practice. It recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities hold the knowledge, authority, experience, family relationships and connections to make the best decisions about the safety and wellbeing of their infants, children, and young people. As Lawrie (2024) explains, reunification approaches should embed the connection and placement elements of the ATSICPP and uphold the concept of **active efforts**, requiring that practitioners strive to remove barriers to family participation and work proactively with families and communities to stay together or be reunified (SNAICC, 2018, p. 10). Active efforts are discussed in detail in the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#). Active effort prompts are also included throughout the Manual of Practice.

Family Group Conferences (FGC) and other formal and informal opportunities to implement [Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal families Framework](#) must be prioritised in work with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, young people and their families across the reunification process. In doing so, DCP case workers must maintain a focus on promoting families' self-determination while acknowledging cultural authority within their family and kinship network. Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal families recognises and seeks to respond to the "lack of respect, recognition and acknowledgement of cultural authority and traditional child-rearing practices" (Hunter et al, 2020, p. 122) that has been identified as a significant barrier to participation in decision-making.

Early consultation with a Principal Aboriginal Consultant is important to ensure practice is culturally informed and appropriately focused on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, children, young people and families. Refer to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#) for further guidance.

8. Considerations for reunification of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

When working with children, young people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in reunification, practice must be culturally safe and responsive. The additional challenges experienced by many families from a CALD background must be acknowledged including the impacts of migration, trauma, settlement stress, discrimination and, for some, uncertainties around immigration or visa status. These factors can affect parenting capacity, access to services and levels of trust toward authorities.

Understanding and respecting the family's cultural norms, values, language, religious practices and parenting styles is essential. Practitioners must avoid imposing mainstream norms and ensure that cultural differences in parenting are not misinterpreted as neglect or harm. Genuine collaboration and cultural consultation with DCP Multicultural Services and community representatives can contribute to culturally safe practice.

Family structures in many CALD communities extend beyond the nuclear family to include cultural kin and broader networks of relatives and community members. Lack of continuity in relationships with family and/or carers from the same cultural background can be particularly detrimental for infants and young children from culturally diverse backgrounds, interfering with their ability to form and preserve cultural connection (Tucker et al, 2025, p. 2). Including kinship and community supports in reunification planning is therefore important, recognising the central role these can play in sustaining care, preserving cultural identity and maintaining family cohesion.





DCP Practice Approach

Family Group Conferences (FGC) and other formal and informal opportunities for family-led decision making must be considered throughout case work with all children, young people and families from a CALD background across reunification. This may include engaging extended family, cultural kin, community and cultural advisors to ensure decisions respect and strengthen the family's cultural networks.

The [CALD child placement Policy](#) provides extensive guidance on empowering families and communities to actively contribute to decision-making, safe placements and inclusive and culturally responsive services focused on the child or young person's best interests. Early consultation with DCP Multicultural Services can support case workers in the provision of culturally safe practice.

9. Special considerations

9.1 Reunification when parents do not live together

When a child or young person's parents or caregivers live apart, reunification efforts may focus on either one, or both, parents. If working with both parents (in separate residences), it is important to ensure that assessment and intervention with each occurs concurrently. Step-parents or new partners should also be assessed to identify any safety concerns and/or protective factors.

Should it become evident, over the course of reunification, that one parent is not demonstrating the required changes, the focus for reunification should shift to the other parent or caregiver. A decision to cease reunification must be promptly communicated to the parent or caregiver and a clear explanation provided.

9.2 Late-stage reunification

Late-stage reunification might be considered when:

- a child or young person is on a long-term order but has no permanent family-based placement option in place, and
- their parent/s or caregivers have demonstrated positive change in addressing the child protection concerns.

Careful consideration should be given to whether late-stage reunification is in the child or young person's best interests. For example, regardless of the positive changes a family of origin has achieved, late-stage reunification is not appropriate if the child or young person is in a stable and secure long-term family-based placement. In this case, the child or young person's permanency needs should be clearly explained to the parent/s and efforts made to support their continuing relationship with the child or young person.

Late-stage reunification highlights the importance of family contact for maintaining enduring connections with parents, siblings, extended family and kinship networks (refer to the [Family contact for children and young people Practice Paper](#) for further guidance). For example, late-stage reunification might become relevant when a child or young person who has had limited or no family contact 'self-places' with their family of origin despite ongoing safety concerns. While the DCP case worker should attempt to maintain the existing placement, managing the safety concerns within the family home might be necessary to reduce the risk to the child or young person.





DCP Practice Approach

Early consultation with a practice leader, psychologist and/or Principal Aboriginal Consultant must occur if late-stage reunification is being considered. For further guidance, refer to the [Permanency Planning Practice Paper](#) and [Support the child or young person to develop and maintain family and community connections through contact arrangements](#) in the Supporting children and young people in care chapter of the Manual of Practice.

When assessing the appropriateness and viability of late-stage reunification, the DCP case worker should consider:

- the nature and evidence of parental progress in relation to the child protection concerns
- changes to the child or young person's needs since last in their parent's care (for example, due to their age, developmental progress, impact/s of their experiences in care)
- the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Significant support for all parties is essential if late-stage reunification is to occur successfully. Options should be explored and secured prior to a decision to reunify. This recognises that the negative consequences of unsuccessful late-stage reunification for children and young people can include homelessness, offending behaviour, mental health difficulties and poor educational and employment outcomes. Young people may be particularly vulnerable if they abruptly leave a placement and lose contact or the support of DCP (Malvaso & Delfabbro, 2020). Supports should include practical assistance and therapeutic support to improve family relationships and address attachment and intergenerational trauma. Ongoing child protection concerns, should these arise, may be managed through external service provision in addition to a DCP case management response.

For comprehensive guidance about the indicators and contra-indicators for reunification, refer to the DCP Assessment Framework. The case planning guidance provided in Develop the case plan in the Case planning, review and annual review chapter of the Manual of Practice is also relevant to late stage reunification.

10. Documentation regarding reunification

Clear, comprehensive and timely documentation regarding reunification is essential, including:

- case records for all aspects of casework that relate to reunification including discussions with the child or young person, carer, parents and service providers
- observations of family contact (refer to [Family contact for children and young people Practice Paper](#))
- assessment of the child or young person's needs and the continuing viability of reunification (refer to the [Undertake family reunification](#) in the Ongoing intervention chapter of the Manual of Practice)
- decisions about the viability of reunification and associated rationales including consultation with practice leaders, Principal Aboriginal Consultants, Multicultural Services or psychologists. These should be documented in the form of a Consult or Decision Record (refer to the [Consult or Decision Record Procedure](#)).

For detailed guidance, refer to the [Case recording Practice Paper](#).





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