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| Contact |
| Information for people seeking contact with children in out-of-home care |

This sheet provides information about your request to have contact with a child or young person in the care of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department).

What needs to happen?

Before a decision can be made about your request to have contact, we need to do an assessment.

You will not be allowed to attend a contact visit unless the assessment is completed and your contact is approved.

Why is an assessment required?

The department is legally required to make sure that children and young people are protected from harm.

All decisions about a child or young person in care must put their best interests first. Contact is about a child’s needs and rights first.

Contact is also for parents and extended family to interact with children and young people. Sometimes children and young people have contact with individuals who are not family members if this is important to the child or young person and it is in their best interests to see the person.

What will an assessment involve?

An assessment will consider the child or young person’s safety and well-being. To make sure that any decision is right for the child or young person, we will need to meet with you to discuss your connection with the family and your reason for wanting to see the child or young person.

The procedure is the same in all cases. Even when a person knows the family well, or has met the child or young person before, an assessment is still required. This is because the child or young person is our priority.

The department understands that an assessment can be stressful. Your private information will be treated with respect and care.

Because of the department’s responsibility to make sure that children and young people are not placed at risk it is usually necessary for a police check to be conducted. Your signed consent will be needed and you will need to provide identification documents that include your photo, name and date of birth.

A police check will only be done with your consent. If you are not willing to undergo a police check it is unlikely that your request for contact would be approved.

It is important that the department is aware of any involvement that Child Protection has had with your family. A check of child protection records will be done.

What if I have a criminal record?

A criminal record will not necessarily prevent you having contact with the child but it will form part of the assessment. The practitioner doing the assessment will discuss this with you.

Who makes the decision?

The decision will usually be made by Child Protection, or in some cases by the Children’s Court.

What if I don’t agree with the decision?

If you don’t agree with a decision about contact, you can speak with the child’s case worker or their manager. Depending on the nature of the protection order, or if there is an interim accommodation order, sometimes the decision about contact may have been made by the Court, rather than Child Protection. You should speak with a lawyer or the Court about becoming a party to the proceedings or about an appeal.

If you are unhappy with the department’s decision about contact, you may contact the Child Protection Operations Manager/Child Protection Director.

You may also contact the Victorian Ombudsman, Level 2, 570 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000, on (03) 9613 6222, or Toll Free on 1800 806 314. The Ombudsman is able to investigate complaints about government departments. The Ombudsman is an office of last resort, so people who have a complaint may be encouraged to use all available avenues for resolving the complaint before the Ombudsman becomes involved.

**If you have difficulty reading English or understanding this information, please tell the case worker.**

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing office for the case is:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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The case worker is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_