

There may be times when foster and kinship carers (Carers) are required to attend a meeting which examines matters relating to their foster or kinship caring responsibilities.

While Carers may have a very positive relationship with the Department for Child Protection (DCP), they may choose to have a support person attend meetings, especially during difficult or challenging situations which have the potential to impact their ongoing care of a child or young person – this includes care concerns.

For Carers who are apprehensive about a meeting, require support with communication (e.g. perhaps speak English as a second language), or where there is a chance of an adverse outcome – having the emotional and moral support of someone they trust and respect can help Carers to manage and understand the situation.

Ultimately, the presence of a support person is intended to:

1. create a more relaxed and less intimidating situation for the Carer, so they feel more confident and better able to impart information;
2. ensure the discussion takes place in a fair and non-threatening environment; and
3. provide assistance and support, helping the Carer during a stressful situation.

Who can be a support person?

A support person may be from the Carer's kinship care team and/or foster care agency, or it could be an independent person – a *trusted friend or family member; a representative from an advocacy agency; or, a legal representative.

CFC-SA advises Carers seek legal advice if they are uncertain about their responsibilities or rights. If the matter is serious or complex, it is recommended that Carers seek legal representation to ensure they understand their rights, are aware of any additional obligations which may arise, and can be assisted to achieve a positive outcome.

**If a support person is not involved as part of the care team, they should be reminded of the confidentiality requirements surrounding children and young people in care and agree to abide by these requirements.*

It is important to brief a support person about the issues which are likely to arise prior to the meeting – wherever they are known. This general understanding of the situation can also help prepare approaches to dealing with emotional responses (for example, if the Carer becomes angry and frustrated – there may be an arrangement to ask for a break; if the Carer becomes upset – the arrangement may be to ask them to take some deep breaths and wait a moment before they respond). It is helpful if these strategies can be agreed prior so a support person can know what will help the Carer and not assume what will help in the moment.

What should a support person do during a meeting?

It is important to confirm to the support person at the outset of the meeting what their role is in the meeting. It should be explained to the support person that they are present in the meeting for emotional support only and they are not there to act as an advocate for the Carer. The Carer must respond and answer questions themselves, not the support person.

A support person should be able to:

- Focus on the Carer's needs during the meeting
- Provide moral and emotional support to the Carer (be seated next to them)
- Assist the Carer during the meeting – this can include
 - o taking notes
 - o asking for a short break during the meeting
 - o consulting with the Carer (for example, a support person may offer a reminder about key points the Carer may have prepared which have not been raised – without disclosing this information on their behalf)
 - o asking questions to seek clarification if needed
 - o intervening if any situation of apparent unfairness arises, if it appears the Carer needs help in understanding or communicating
 - o helping the Carer regain composure if they are feeling emotional or having difficulties (using strategies agreed prior to the meeting wherever possible)
- Provide the Carer with support immediately following the meeting

A support person should NOT:

- Be a minor
- Provide personal opinions during the meeting
- Answer questions on behalf of the Carer
- Defend Carers from any allegations
- Disrupt the meeting or unreasonably interfere with the meeting processes
- Act in the role as a legal representative (if not a practicing lawyer)

Where a support person becomes overly involved in the process or attempts to advocate for the Carer, the meeting may be suspended so the role and function of the support person can be clarified, or the meeting terminated and rescheduled for another time while an alternative support person is selected.

For more information, or to discuss your personal circumstances, please contact us:

Email: support@cfc-sa.org.au
Freecall: 1800 732 272

This Carer Guide is intended to outline the role of a support person only. It does not identify the roles or responsibilities of advocates, support workers or other representatives.