

KEEPING YOUR PARENT IDENTITY WHEN YOUR CHILD IS IN OOHC

A Resource for Parents written by Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter Peer Parent Expert

When your children enter Out of Home Care (OOHC), it can feel like more than just separation—it can feel like your parental identity has been taken away. Despite the language used by others—terms like "birth parent" or "former carer"—it's important to remember that your role and identity as a parent are not erased. Your children still need you, and maintaining your parental identity is crucial for their sense of belonging and for your own well-being.

Why Parental Identity Matters

Your identity as a parent is vital because:

- Children Need Their Parents: Even in OOHC, children benefit from the connection, memory, and sense of belonging that comes from knowing their parents.
- Emotional Continuity: Maintaining your role supports your child's sense of self and continuity.
- Mental Well-being: Losing parental identity can deepen grief, trauma, and hopelessness.

Holding onto your identity as a parent is an act of love, responsibility, and care.

Common Challenges

Parents often encounter challenges that erode their parental identity:

- Being labeled as a "birth parent" rather than "mum" or "dad."
- Decisions made about their child without their input.
- Feeling observed or judged during family visits.
- Being excluded from everyday parenting moments.

These experiences can foster feelings of shame and self-doubt, but it's important to recognize that these feelings are not personal failures.

Staying Connected to Your Parental Identity

Even without daily caregiving responsibilities, there are ways to remain connected to your identity as a parent:

1. Stay Present in Your Child's Life

- Request updates on their school, health, and milestones.
- Write letters or notes, even if they aren't shared immediately.
- Preserve photos and memories.
- Celebrate special occasions in your own way.

2. Affirm Your Role

Language matters. Call yourself "mum" or "dad" and correct any language that feels erasing. Remember, your parenthood is not conditional.

3. Use Family Time for Genuine Connection

Family time can be stressful, but remember that your child needs the real you, not a performance. Focus on warmth, listening, and presence.

4. Care for Yourself

Taking care of yourself does not mean you've stopped caring for your child. It helps you stay emotionally available and resilient.

5. Connect with Supportive Communities

Seek out peer support workers, other parents, and advocates who respect and affirm your role as a parent.

A Reminder for Hard Days

"Even when my kids weren't with me, I was still their mum. Loving them didn't stop just because the system said my role had changed."

Your children know who you are, and your love remains constant. Your parenthood is not erased by circumstances. You are still a parent—especially now.

Remember, your role as a parent is enduring, and your connection with your children is invaluable.

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