

WHAT IS FAMILY PRESERVATION?

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

Family preservation is a **child protection approach focused on keeping children at home** with their parents by offering **early support** when concerns are identified.

The aim is to **address risks before removal happens**, by reducing stress on families and strengthening safety **with parents**, not instead of them.

It recognises that many families come to the attention of child protection not because they don't love or care for their children, but because they are:

- living with domestic or family violence
- experiencing poverty, housing instability, or isolation
- dealing with mental health or substance use issues
- overwhelmed, unsupported, or navigating trauma

Family preservation is meant to step in **early**, and support children to remain at home.

How family preservation usually works

Family preservation support is generally:

- **Voluntary** – parents are asked to agree to it
- **Short-term** – often weeks or a few months
- **Practical** – focused on day-to-day safety and stability

Support might include:

- Home visiting and check-ins

- Help with routines, supervision, or daily care
- Linking families with housing, counselling, DV, or AOD services
- Safety planning with the family
- Practical help like transport, appointments, or advocacy
- Working alongside parents to reduce stressors affecting them and their children

The goal is to **reduce immediate risks** so children can stay safely with their parents.

Family preservation is about **keeping children with their parents** by providing **early, practical support** when a family is under stress, **before** things escalate to removal.

The idea is to help **families stay together**, not to separate them. The focus is **child safety and family support**, at the same time.

What it is not

Family preservation is **not**:

- Court-ordered
- About proving you're a "good enough" parent
- Not a replacement for legal advice
- Not punishment for asking for help
- Not the same as voluntary help outside the system

It's about building you a support system

Why it matters

When done well, family preservation:

- Prevents unnecessary removals
- Reduces trauma for children and parents
- Supports parents earlier, when change is more achievable
- Keeps family, culture, and community connections intact

Parents often tell us they didn't realise:

- how serious things were,
- what refusing or disengaging might mean
- that preservation support can end quickly if risks escalate.

What parents are often not told clearly

Many parents say they didn't realise:

- how serious the concerns were
- what would cause preservation to end
- how quickly things could escalate
- that support could stop if risks increased
- what "success" actually looked like

Without clear information, parents may believe:

"If I'm getting help, my kids must be safe from removal."

That misunderstanding can be devastating. It's important you understand what is happening and are engaging with your services, getting legal advice, recording what is going on and asking for clarification when things are unclear.

Links to different types of family preservation programs <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/service-providers/deliver-services-to-children-and-families/family-preservation/family-preservation-programs.html>

"I thought family preservation meant things were okay – that they were helping us so my kids could stay home. No one actually sat down and said how serious it was, or what would happen if things didn't change fast enough. I didn't realise I was closer to removal than support. If I had understood that earlier, I would have asked for more help and more clarity straight away."

"Preservation support ended quickly when I stopped showing up to programs and AOD tests, then all of a sudden they talked about removal, it felt like it came out of nowhere. Looking back, I can see the signs, but at the time, no one clearly said 'this is what's at stake.' I wish someone

had been honest instead of reassuring. Now I see my child once a month and its heartbreakingly painful for both of us.”

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