

WHERE IS MY CHILD?

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

This information sheet explains what information DCJ or an out-of-home care (OOHC) agency must give you about your child's placement.

"The worst part was not knowing where my child was or who they were with. No one would tell me anything, I didn't know what to do."

What DCJ or the OOHC Agency Must Tell You

DCJ or the OOHC agency is **legally required to give you some information** about where your child has been placed.

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-157#sec.149C>

They can only limit this information if they believe telling you would place:

- your child
- another family member, or
- the carer

at risk of harm. <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-157#sec.149I>

If information is limited, **they should write to you** and explain:

- why the information is being restricted, and
- what level of information you will be given.
- What changes you would need to make to change this.

“Not knowing felt like a deliberate attempt to push me over the edge. I didn’t even know what questions I was allowed to ask.”

Your Right to Know About Placement

You have a right to know key details about your child’s placement, including:

- whether your child is placed close to home or far away
- whether travel will be required for family time (visits)

If your child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you also have the right to know:

- whether your child is placed **on Country**, and
- how the placement complies with the **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles** <https://www.snaicc.org.au/our-work/child-and-family-wellbeing/child-placement-principle/>

This includes whether your child is placed with:

- family
- kin, or
- within their community

If DCJ does not clearly tell you this information, ask:

- your lawyer
- your advocate, or
- a support service

to formally request confirmation of where and with whom your child is placed.

“I had to push just to find out whether my child was with family or strangers.”

Updates and seeing your Child

DCJ states that:

- a caseworker must organise a time for your child to **see and hear from you**

- you should receive **updates** about how your child is going while they are not in your care

However, many parents say this **does not always happen**.

If you are not receiving updates or family time is delayed:

- ask your lawyer, advocate, or support service to contact DCJ on your behalf
- ask for updates and family time to be organised **as soon as possible. Keep asking, ask in writing and in person/phone.**
- Make a complaint. Call your local CSC <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/contact-us/csc.html> or the complaints and feedback line Email: complaints@dcj.nsw.gov.au

"I kept being told someone would call me back. Weeks went by and I heard nothing."

Do not give up, keep asking by phone and email you have the right to be told why.

Record every time you attempted to ask. This will be part of your evidence when you are heard.

If Your Child Is in Foster Care

If your child is placed in foster care:

- the foster carer has the right to keep their **identity and personal details private**
- you may not be told the carer's name or address

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/foster-relative-and-kinship-care/caring-for-children-and-young-people/legal-rights-and-responsibilities-for-carers/out-of-home-care-release-of-placement-information-legislation>

DCJ **must tell you** if your child is placed a long distance away, because:

- you have the right to family time with your child
- you need to know if travel is required for family time

Some parents say that where a foster carer supports the parent-child relationship, it can help:

- family time run more smoothly, and
- increase the chances of a successful restoration (your child returning home)
- make things easier for your child
- make you feel a little more confident about their needs being met

However, building this relationship is **not always possible** and does not replace DCJ's responsibility to support contact and communication.

If Your Child Is in Residential Care

Residential care is different to foster or kinship care. It usually involves group homes or residential units staffed by rotating workers.

If your child is placed in residential care, it is common for parents to feel even more fear and uncertainty.

You may experience:

- Very limited information about your child's daily life
- Decisions being made by the residential provider rather than with you
- Family time being reduced, tightly controlled, or delayed
- Updates coming through reports instead of conversations

Residential care is often used for children and young people who are already experiencing significant trauma or distress. Being separated from family, living with unfamiliar adults, and coping with shift-based care can be very hard for children and add to their stress. It can also be used short term until suitable carers are found (or they can come home to you).

If You Are Not Being Told What You Need to Know

If you feel information is being withheld or you are left in the dark:

- write down what you have asked for and when
- ask your lawyer or advocate to make formal requests
- seek support from an independent or peer-led service

You are still your child's parent. You have a right to information. Not knowing where your child is or how they are is frightening, and you should not be left to carry that fear alone.

Contact Information:

- Email: contact@finclusionh.org
- Support:
parentpeersnewcastle@gmail.com
- Website: <https://finclusionh.org>

