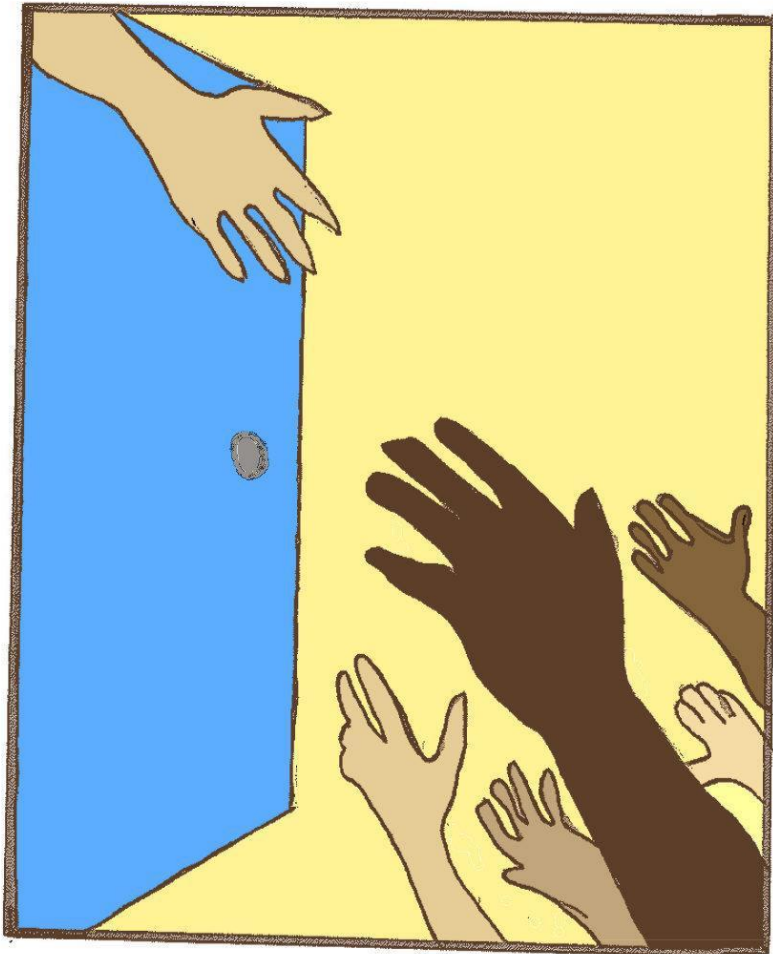


It's a Home, Not a House

A resource for people working with young people in residential care



This resource was written by a young person living in residential care and further developed with feedback from young people involved in CREATE Foundation's Queensland Youth Advisory Group. Inside you will find tips about relationship building with young people living in residential care.

This resource guide will help you understand what you can do to support young people to reach their full potential and make their time in residential care the most successful and rewarding experience that it can be. I started writing this document because I was tired of seeing the missed opportunities for youth workers to build positive relationships with kids living in residential care. I know these kids are challenging but, through your work, you have an opportunity to make positive changes in their lives. (Young person aged 16 years)



Important things to keep in mind when working with young people living in residential care...

(You could put these tips on a sign in your office)

- The quality of the relationship between a young person and their youth worker is of utmost importance. Many young people report a direct correlation between the quality of their care experience and the quality of their relationship/s with their residential workers. For this reason, it is important that workers nurture their relationships with young people, even if they do not initially connect with an individual.
- It is important for workers to see young people as the experts in their own lives and allow them to make decisions for themselves. Young people identify this opportunity as important for the development of decision making and general life skills. It is often positive for young people to make decisions for themselves, even if the outcome is not as they would have liked. In this instance it is important that workers avoid criticising a young person but rather let them know that they are there for them as a support person should they require it.
- Workers need to understand that there are reasons why young people behave the way that they do and that their life experiences often contribute to these behaviours and the way that they respond to their environment. A workers response should to be individualised and respectful of a young person's needs and wishes. When a young person acts out it is important that a worker does not assume to know why they are feeling upset/angry/frustrated. When it is appropriate to do so, speak with the young person. Do not judge their behaviour. Be patient and let the young person know that you care!



- Be inquisitive. Never assume that you know how a young person is feeling. If they are emotional then ask if they would like to speak with you. Let them tell you how they are feeling and why. Let them tell you how you could be of assistance to them. If they don't want to speak with you then give them the space that they need.
- NEVER show a young person that you are angry or frustrated with them. This is not helpful.
- Be sympathetic. Acknowledge how a young person may feel even if you are unable to see things from their point of view.
- Be flexible. Young people understand why there are rules and regulations in place however it's important that a young person's life resembles 'normality' as much as possible.
- Be present when you are on shift. Don't be distracted and don't bring your personal issues to work.
- Be open to sharing things about yourself with the young people that you are working with. You can still maintain good boundaries whilst allowing the young people to get to know things about you. This helps young people to connect with you, making the working relationship more positive.



Characteristics of a good residential worker:

- Good communication skills; making sure that information important to the young person is passed on between workers.
- Taking an interest in the young person and remembering things that they've done.
- Respecting a young person's privacy. It's important that residential workers don't disclose personal information about young people to other young people living in the residential.
- Give the young people space. A good worker respects when young people need time to themselves, especially when they are upset. They don't pressure a young person to talk, they just let them know that they are there for them if and when they are ready.
- Patience when building a relationship. Don't force yourself upon a young person. Give them time to get to know you at their own pace.
- Encourage a young person to be engaged in their education. Help a young person to complete their school work.
- Celebrate good behaviour, don't just punish bad behaviour.
- Encourage and support young people to participate in extra-curricular activities that they identify as being important to them (i.e. encouraging involvement with CREATE Foundation, Girls Brigade, sporting groups, religious activities, arts)



Transition to Independence:

Transition to independence and planning for this stage of a young person's life is incredibly important. It should be handled by residential workers carefully and sensitively. Good planning results in a young person being successfully independent once they have left care or have transitioned into semi-independent living.

Important things to remember when helping a young person to plan for their transition to independence:

- Don't rush a young person. Yes, they have a set amount of time to prepare for their transition to independence but this is best done in consultation with the young person when they feel ready and able to do so.
- Young people must be encouraged to participate in and be consulted about decisions that will affect them.
- Give the young person increased responsibilities (such as asking that they assist with house work and catch public transport) but balance this with increased freedom (such as allowing them to have a later curfew and spend time with friends).
- Assisting a young person to develop life skills is essential. This must begin at a young age.
- All young people are individuals with different needs and interests. Young people must be treated as such during the transition to independence planning process



- Be flexible. A good transition to independence plan is vital but sometimes it's important and more beneficial for the young person if there are flexibility around these rules. For example, a young person who is being encouraged to catch public transport to and from school/TAFE appreciates residential workers who will sometimes deviate from this plan - especially if a young person is feeling unwell or not having a good day.

*Since 2010, **G-Force**, led by young people with an out-of-home care experience themselves, has discussed, promoted ideas and developed action plans towards achieving best practice regarding (1) the inclusion and participation of children and young people in out-of-home care in making decisions that impact on them and (2) transition from care planning for young people exiting out-of-home care to adulthood and independence.*

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