



Wellbeing in Care Concerns

What is Wellbeing in Care

The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a paramount consideration for everyone involved in their care. The Child Safety Service has a legislative responsibility to address and promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Out of Home Care (OOHC). Every child in care has a right to grow up in a safe and stable environment; to reach his or her full potential and to be treated fairly and with respect.

A child's wellbeing, no matter the type of household they live in, is understood in terms of the six Child and Youth Wellbeing Domains:

The Six Domains of Child and Youth Wellbeing



When a worry or concern is raised about a child in OOHC, careful consideration of each wellbeing domain is needed to ensure a full assessment of, and planning for, the best interests of the child in that particular care household. The assessment and planning need to be inclusive, culturally responsive, grounded in respectful relationships with a collaborative and multi-disciplinary approach.

The Child Safety Service is committed to enhancing the wellbeing of children who have entered the OOHC service system and resolving any worries or concerns about their wellbeing in care through a process that is inclusive, transparent, and relational.

When there is information suggesting that there are worries or concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child in their placement, the Child Safety Service will respond through a Wellbeing in Care (WIC) process to ensure worries or concerns regarding the safety and well-being of the child are appropriately addressed.

What is a Wellbeing in Care Worry or Concern?

These used to be called Care Concerns.

The six Domains of Child and Youth Wellbeing¹ are a cornerstone for identifying worries about a child in OOHC and planning for restoring and enhancing wellbeing.

Responding to worries and concerns about children in care is a collective responsibility, involving the Child Safety Service and the child's Care Team.

Collaboratively the Care Team work together to plan, consult, and respond to worries and concerns about a child's wellbeing in care in a trauma informed, therapeutic and developmentally appropriate way.

Worries and concerns about children's wellbeing in OOHC could relate to:

- Circumstances where a child has, or is likely to, experience sexual, physical and emotional abuse within the care situation.
- Circumstances where lower-level and repeated concerns about physical discipline and/or emotional harm in care are impacting the wellbeing of a child.
- Any matters of the care situation that may be impacting a child's opportunity to experience safety and stability in order to grow and develop.

The Policy

The Child Safety Service manage WIC worries or concerns according to the current *Wellbeing in Care Policy, Procedure, Practice Advice and the OOHC Child Safe Code of Conduct*.

WIC worries and concerns are managed according to how the issues can best be resolved. Minor worries about care are dealt with differently to concerns of a more serious or chronic nature.

If a carer is supported by a Community Service Organisation, the service may have additional procedural guidelines for the management of WIC concerns. Carers should follow up with their Community Service Organisation for any such guidelines.

A copy of the Wellbeing in Care Policy and OOHC Child Safe Code of Conduct can be provided on request.

Scope of the policy

This policy applies to the Child Safety Service and Community Service Organisations that provide Out of Home Care services. The policy has been developed for children and young people who are in the custody, guardianship or care of the Secretary and placed with an approved carer or licensed care provider.

Relevant placement types include foster care, residential care (including therapeutic), relative or kinship care, family group homes, and respite care.

OOHC Child Safe Code of Conduct (Interim)

The OOHC Child Safe Code of Conduct outlines expected behaviours from all external staff and volunteers working in and for the service when interacting with children. The Code of Conduct provides clear guidance on what is unacceptable or concerning behaviour, assists with how to recognise when there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct and outlines the likely actions the Child Safety Service will take if there has been a breach of the code.

Note: This interim Out of Home Care (OOHC) Child Safe Code of Conduct is in place until a decision is made regarding the development of broader Standards or a Code for the Department for Education, Children and Young People (Department) as part of the National Child Safe Standards and Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework for Tasmania.

What happens when a Wellbeing in Care Worry or Concern is raised?

Concerning information or incidents with children or young people can be raised in many ways and from different sources.

The Child Safety Service has a responsibility to receive, record and assess all WIC worries and concerns and determine what action is required to resolve the issue.

The specific action taken to respond to a WIC worry or concern is dependent on many factors because the circumstances of every carer, child and young person are different.

All decisions and actions about a child's wellbeing in care, including addressing and responding to worries and concerns are:

- strongly informed by the child's voice;
- responded to through processes that are relational and based on unconditional positive regard;
- holistic, not forensic or episodic;
- timely;
- culturally appropriate; and
- guided by the Child Safety Practice Frameworkⁱⁱ.

It's important that when information is received or incidents happen, the Child Safety Service is advised immediately so a collaborative response can be planned.

Consultation with the Child Safety Service needs to occur before any Service Provider internal investigations commence with staff or children. This will ensure we adhere to the requirements of police and our legislative responsibilities.

When information is received about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child in OOHC, the first step in the process is for the Child Safety Service to determine whether the information is a WIC Worry or WIC Concern so that it can be managed accordingly. When the matter is more complex the Child Safety Service may convene an Initial WIC Co-ordination meeting to consult and help determine how the worries or concerns are best managed.

Wellbeing in Care Worry

A *WIC Worry* relates to worries about the child's wellbeing in placement (could relate to any domain of wellbeing).

A *WIC Worry*:

- is not of a serious nature;
- does not breach the Child Safe Code of Conduct or reach the threshold for risk; and
- can often be resolved within the Care Team.

How the worries have been addressed and what supports have been put in place will be recorded in the minutes of Care Team meetings (Care Team Record).

Wellbeing in Care Concern

A *WIC Concern* relates to safety or risk worries specific to the child's safety (specifically Loved & Safe domain).

A *WIC Concern*:

- involves serious or criminal allegations, and/or
- a potential breach of the Child Safe Code of Conduct has occurred; and/or
- the child or young person is allegedly at risk according to Section 4 of the *CYPFA*.

It is the shared responsibility of carers, Community Service Organisations and the Child Safety Service to ensure the safety, stability and well-being of children and young people in OOHC.

Wherever possible a child or young person's placement will be maintained during the WIC process.

If the child or young person is safe from harm in the placement, the aim of the WIC process will be to provide additional support and strategies to resolve problems and enable the care placement to continue.

However, in some situations a child or young person may need to be removed from their placement to ensure their safety while investigations occur. This decision is made after consultation within the Child Safety Service and is endorsed by Principle Practice Managers.

If a WIC Concern has been raised about a child in care, a carer or provider can expect:

- to be informed both verbally and in writing that a WIC Concern has been raised.
- to be linked in with supports to assist with participating and coping during the WIC Concern process.
- to have regular contact with their OOHC provider/OOHC support to talk about the WIC Concern and to be provided with an update of the process.
- the details of the WIC Concern, any assessment, and the outcome to be accurately documented on the child's and carer's files at the Child Safety Service.
- to receive a written summary of the outcome and recommendations.
- to be supported to implement any changes that will improve the placement.

If the WIC Concern is one of sexual or physical abuse, or alleges that a crime may have been committed, a referral to Tasmania Police is immediate and concurrent with communication and safety planning with the child, carer, and other relevant people in the child's network as appropriate.

Where a WIC Concern has been reported to Tasmania Police, carers can expect that the Child Safety Service will not be able to discuss the details of the concern itself while Police complete their investigations, but will be able to discuss the care and needs of the child and the needs of any other children in the home.

Support for carers

When a WIC Worry or WIC Concern is raised, it is recognised that this can be upsetting and stressful for carers. It is important that processes are in place to ensure the safety of the child, and also ensure that carers are treated fairly and are informed and supported throughout the process.

Carers are encouraged to identify both formal and informal support people to assist them through the WIC process. One possible role of the support person is to be present during conversations with Child Safety Service staff. People identified as carer supports can explore practical day-to-day strategies such as counselling for the carer, or respite for the children in their care.

Formal support options include:

- Foster and Kinship Carers Association - The Foster Care Advocacy and Support Team (FAST) – the co-ordinator can be contacted on 1800 149 994
- Other people from the carer's Community Service Organisation.
- A Child Safety Service Out of Home Care worker.

In line with this policy, carers can expect to be listened to and respected throughout the process of responding to WIC Worries or Concerns and for a balanced approach to the WIC process to be taken. This process aims to appropriately identify carer's support needs so that they are best able to provide high-quality care for all children.

Feedback and complaints

Carers involved in a WIC process are welcome to provide feedback and discuss any issues with their Out of Home Care worker or Community Service Organisation (if involved).

If carers continue to have any unresolved issues regarding the WIC process, they can be put in contact with a Practice Manager to discuss these issues. If this does not resolve the carer's concerns, the carer can request a review by the Principle Practice Manager.

Carers can also direct unresolved complaints to the Ombudsman.

ⁱ [Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework](#)

https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5549/1-Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf, (accessed 30 March 2021)

ⁱⁱ [Child Safety Practice Framework](#)

<https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/children/child-safety-service/child-safety-practice-framework> (accessed 30 March 2021)