

## Permanent care can be challenging

Many children who are in permanent care have had troubled lives. While living with their birth family, they may have experienced abuse, neglect or rejection. This can lead to challenging behaviours and difficulties in forming trusting relationships. The permanent care family is likely to experience a challenging time until the child starts to trust the new family environment.

### Period of adjustment

After experiencing trauma associated with abuse, neglect or disruption, many children are slow to put their trust in anyone. A permanent care family needs patience. It might take a child some time, perhaps even years, to settle into their new family and school environments. How easily they do so depends on the child's background and experience, and the way in which the permanent care parent(s) choose to handle the child's behaviour. Above all, the child needs stability, certainty and structure, along with emotional support, understanding and a feeling of unwavering acceptance and commitment.

### Behavioural difficulties

Each child reacts in their own way to their unique circumstances, but some common behavioural difficulties include:

- Anger and aggressive behaviour
- Bed wetting
- Emotional immaturity
- High levels of anxiety
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour.

### Fear of change

The child may have experienced insecurity and instability from their earliest memories, so any change, no matter how small, can feel threatening. Permanent care parents can help by introducing predictable family routines and informing the child well in advance of any unexpected event, such as an outing. Setting consistent limits will help provide structure and security for the child.

### Problems at school

Children in permanent care families may face special challenges at school, including:

- A history of disrupted schooling, if they have moved around a lot in earlier years
- Difficulties adjusting to the structured classroom environment
- Inappropriate behaviour toward peers, for example, inappropriate sexual behaviour, aggression or difficulties forming relationships
- Being seen by peers as different.

### Working with the teacher

The child's permanent care parent(s) and school teacher can work together to help the child adjust. Some strategies to consider include:

- It is important to discuss with the child's caseworker what information is appropriate to pass on to the staff when settling a child into a new school.

- Maintain close contact with the school and support the child with positive behaviour at school as well as at home.
- Ask the teacher to establish a familiar classroom routine for the child, including telling the child in advance of any changes, such as excursions.
- Make copies of old school reports available.
- Be open to suggestions regarding assisted learning programs.
- Work together to develop ways to teach the child how to play and make friends.

## Professional help and counselling

The Department of Human Services is a good place to start for information and referral. There is an Adoption and Permanent Care Team in each Department of Human Services region. Services include:

- Applicant assessment
- Placement of children
- Post-placement supervision
- Counselling.

## Where to get help

Contact the Victorian Government Adoption and Permanent Care Program in your Department of Human Services region:

- Northern Metropolitan Region Tel. (03) 9479 0558
- Western Metropolitan Region, Anglicare Western Tel. (03) 9687 5200
- Southern Metropolitan Region, Uniting Care Connections Tel. (03) 9521 5666
- Eastern Metropolitan Region Tel. (03) 9843 6413
- Barwon South Western Region Tel. (03) 5226 4540
- Gippsland Region, Anglicare Gippsland Tel. (03) 5133 9998
- Hume Region Tel. (03) 5832 1500
- Loddon Mallee Permanent Care Tel. (03) 5440 1100
- Grampians Region, Child and Family Services Ballarat Tel. (03) 5332 1434
- Statewide, Centacare Family Services Tel. (03) 9689 3888

## Things to remember

- Many children in permanent care have a history of abuse or neglect.
- It may take some time for a child to settle into a permanent care family and start to feel secure.
- Working together with the child's school teacher is vital if the child is to adjust happily to their new environment.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

DHS - Children Youth & Families

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