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| Information for parents |
| Child care agreements and voluntary placements |

# What is a voluntary placement?

A voluntary placement is when you enter an agreement with a service to provide care for your child for a period of time in accordance with Part 3.5 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The placement is called voluntary, as you choose for your child to be placed out of your care. The service may be the Department of Human Services, a registered out-of-home care service or a disability service provider.

## Why would I need a voluntary placement for my child?

Voluntary placements are helpful when you are unable to care for your child for a period of time and family and friends cannot help. You might need to go to hospital or be experiencing family or personal difficulties. Sometimes Child protection will advise you a voluntary placement is necessary as part of a plan to address concerns that have led to their involvement.

## Who will care for my child in a voluntary placement?

The service will arrange a placement for your child with carers. Carers may be volunteers who have been assessed and trained to care for children in their own home, or employees who care for children in residential facilities. Wherever possible, placements are made in close proximity to your home, so there is as little disruption as possible to your child’s daily routine. In addition to providing a placement for your child, the service will likely assist you to resolve the issues or difficulties that you are experiencing so you are able to resume the care of your child as soon as possible.

## By agreeing to a voluntary placement, what else am I agreeing to?

Before a voluntary placement can occur, you must sign a child care agreement. By signing this agreement, you are authorising the service, or sometimes a suitable person to provide for the care of your child, including providing medical consent when you are not contactable.

## What are my rights and responsibilities when I sign an agreement?

Signing an agreement does not alter your rights and responsibilities as a parent. You will maintain guardianship and custody of your child and all your rights and responsibilities as a parent continue, including:

* having regular contact with your child
* being involved in major decisions affecting your child
* being informed if your child is ill or injured
	+ contributing to the cost of caring for your child.

If you have concerns about the care of your child or their placement arrangement, you have the right to raise these concerns with the person in charge of the service.

What are my rights if I don’t have custody and enter into an agreement?

The parent who does have custody can request the service to return the child to their care. The service is required to return the child to the parent with custody as soon as you have been notified, or within a reasonable time if you cannot be contacted.

## Can I see my child when they are in a voluntary placement?

Regular contact with your child is important. Before the placement occurs, the service will make contact arrangements to suit yourself, your child and the carer.

## Can I end the placement?

A placement can be ended at any time during the agreement, not just when it’s scheduled to end. The agreement can be ended by either yourself or the service. When this occurs, your child will be returned to your care as soon as possible. If Child protection is involved, the agreement may stipulate an understanding as to a proposed plan, should the agreement end early.

## What else do I need to know?

There are maximum periods of care under agreements. Agreements can be extended, following consultation with a delegate of the Secretary of the department. Agreements must also be reviewed after certain periods by the department. You can request a review of a decision made under or in relation to an agreement if you are unsatisfied with the decision.

Depending on the length of a placement arrangement, Centrelink benefits such as Family Tax Benefit may be affected. Likewise, if your child is in receipt of a Centrelink benefit, the service may expect part of this be used to contribute to their care.

If your involvement in decision-making is lacking or not consistent in meeting the needs of your child during the agreement, the local Child protection office may need to be notified.

The service and the department will store your personal information on their records. These records will be stored safely and will only be accessible to persons for the purpose of providing services or carrying out legal requirements under the agreement.

Child care agreements are regulated under legislation or law. In accordance with the law, the Secretary of the Department of Human Services must be notified of agreements, be consulted on their extension, undertake their review at certain times, approve the entering into of long-term agreements and in some cases, approve a person as suitable to have the long-term care of a child. The Secretary has delegated her functions and powers in relation to agreements to senior Child Protection Managers in local department offices.

## To find out more

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 Speak with your local service or Department of Human Services office.