



ChildProtectionPeak

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Child Protection Peak Limited

Practice Standards



ChildProtectionPeak

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection **PRACTICE STANDARDS**

Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection practice standards seek to achieve:

- better outcomes for children and families
- a strong, sustainable and capable sector able to deliver these outcomes.

The practice standards honour the enduring cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, drawing on knowledge systems of growing up children and their connections to family, community, country and culture. These connections are central to children's safety and well being, and the promotion of their development, self esteem, identity and sense of belonging.

The practice standards acknowledge the impact of colonisation and the forced removal of children from their families on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The profound sense of loss and grief this has caused in the past, and continues to cause today, emphasises the critical role of healing in responding to the needs of children, families and communities.

Importantly, the practice standards build on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (CPP) developed in the late 1970s by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. The CPP was established in the belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are best cared for within their own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

The practice standards establish a platform for providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and families, and supporting organisations in their efforts to continuously improve the delivery of these services.

The practice standards are consistent with the:

- Child Protection Act (1999)
- Human Services Quality Framework
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The standards apply to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services including

- Child and Family Support
- Recognised Entity
- Out of Home Care.

A practice framework has been developed to guide practice and inform the development of practice standards. The practice framework seeks to guide staff in engaging and working with children, families and communities; to promote consistency in approaches across organisations; and, thereby, to improve outcomes for children and families.

The practice framework identifies:

- Vision
- Values
- Principles
- Knowledge
- Outcomes
- Stages of working with children and families

Vision

for our children is -

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are physically, emotionally and spiritually strong; live in safe, caring and nurturing environments within their own families and communities; and are afforded the same life opportunities available to other children and young people to achieve their full potential.

PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Guiding values and beliefs

The values and beliefs which guide our work include -

Children

Children have a special place within family and community.

'The destiny of a nation will unfold once we can see the potential in all of our children. As parents, as peoples we are the guardians of the future through infant dreaming. Children have a right to live out their story as it should be. Protected, nurtured yet free to dream dreams and achieve brilliance'¹

Children are central to life and culture.

Family

Families and communities are responsible for 'growing up' children, ensuring they are safe and well, and defining how they are connected. Supporting families and communities to care for their children will protect future generations from the devastating effects of removal from family, community, culture and country because it recognises a child's intrinsic connection to their extended family.²

Culture and tradition

Culture and tradition connects children to their family and community, providing them with a sense of belonging and identity. Strengthening connections to culture and tradition is therefore central to protecting children and families, promoting cultural safety and ensuring healthy children, families and communities. The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and traditions is acknowledged and respected.

Self determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are responsible for the safety and well being of children and families. We are best placed to understand matters directly affecting our children, families and communities. We must therefore use all available resources to exercise our responsibilities and take control over addressing these matters.

“ The destiny of a nation will unfold once we can see the potential in all of our children. As parents, as peoples we are the guardians of the future through infant dreaming. Children have a right to live out their story as it should be. Protected, nurtured yet free to dream dreams and achieve brilliance. ”

¹ Dr Helen Milroy
² SNAICC

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The principles informing our practice include -

<h2>SAFETY AND WELL BEING</h2>	<p>The safety and the well being of children and young people are paramount in any decisions and actions about their protection and care. Safety and well being is concerned with the physical, emotional, developmental, cultural and spiritual needs of children and young people.</p> <p>The safety and well being of children and young people are best secured within their own family, community and culture.</p> <p>Where children and young people are unable to be safely cared for by their parents, their connection to family, community and culture will be maintained and strengthened.</p>
<h2>STRENGTHS BASED</h2>	<p>The intrinsic individual and collective strengths of families and communities in nurturing and caring for children are acknowledged and used as a foundation for promoting the safety and well being of children, and strong families.</p>
<h2>PARTICIPATION</h2>	<p>The voices of children, young people and their families will be actively sought and respected in all decisions affecting them.</p>
<h2>CULTURALLY SAFE</h2>	<p>Children's and families' culture will be honoured and respected in all aspects of practice and service delivery.</p> <p>Children's and families' attachment to community, country and culture will be recognised and actively facilitated.</p>

Children will be protected and cared for when parents, families and communities are physically, emotionally, culturally and spiritually strong.

Responses to child abuse and neglect will recognise the impact of trauma, poverty and structural inequality on parents, families and communities.

Responses to trauma caused by the legacy of colonisation and the forced removal of children from their families, and the continuing disruption of connections to family, community and culture are best underpinned by a healing approach.

Parents', families', communities' and services' shared responsibility for ensuring children's safety and well being will be recognised and actively facilitated.

Services will work together with parents, families, communities and other organisations to promote children's safety and well being.

Knowledge from a range of sources influences how children and families are engaged and supported. Staff draw upon:

- Personal knowledge* - their lived experience and life stories.
- Children and family knowledge* - the knowledge and experience of children and families.
- Cultural knowledge* - their knowledge of culture and tradition.
- Professional knowledge* - theories which help explain human behaviour and change, and practice experience and wisdom gained on the job.
- Research or empirical knowledge* – current and emerging research base for practice.

Children	Families
Children are safe from physical, emotional, psychological and cultural harm, are cared for and nurtured.	Families are strong and can provide a safe, secure, nurturing and culturally supportive home for their children.
Children are connected to their family, community, country and culture.	Families are connected to their community, country and culture.
Children are physically and emotionally healthy, enjoying learning and proud of who they are.	
Where families are unable to provide safe, secure, nurturing and culturally supportive care to their children, an appropriate alternative environment is secured to meet their needs.	

HOLISTIC

PARTNERSHIP

KNOWLEDGE

OUTCOMES

STAGES OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The concept of 'storylines' is a critical part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander oral traditions and knowledge systems. Storylines communicate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and beliefs about children, families, communities and country; establish the interconnections between children, family, community, and country; and connect the past, present and future.

Importantly, this approach contributes to an understanding of the impact of colonisation and the removal of children on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and traditions, and how it continues to impact storylines for growing up children within family, community, and country. It emphasises the importance of reconnecting children and families to culture through restoration and healing.

The concept of storylines is used in the practice framework and standards to identify the key stages of working with vulnerable children and families.

A range of individual, family, systemic and historical factors affect the capacity of families to provide a safe, secure, nurturing and culturally supportive home for their children. However, the mix of these factors and how they affect each child and family varies. This is their storyline, their story of how they come to this situation. Understanding their story and journey is fundamental to changing it and establishing a new story. A shared understanding of the child's and family's storyline is developed and strategies are put in place to reduce their vulnerability and strengthen their capacity to protect and care for their children. In this way, the child and family establish a new storyline.

Underpinning this approach is the sharing of knowledge and learning by children, family, community members and services providers.

The key stages of working with children and families are:

Engaging the child, family and community

Engagement starts before a referral is received. Engagement is concerned with organisations participating in the community and establishing respectful relationships with people, groups and services. This provides a foundation for effectively engaging with children and families when they are referred for a service. Engagement is focused on establishing trusting and respectful relationships so that children and families feel safe in telling their story.

Identifying the storyline

Identifying a child's and family's storyline underpins assessment and planning. The child's and family's storyline is the window to how they have become vulnerable and in need of assistance. It is the entry to a strengths based approach in working with children and families in assessing strengths and underlying needs, and developing agreed plans. The agreed plan establishes goals and identifies what needs to happen to change the child's and family's storyline so that they are less vulnerable and in need of assistance.

Changing the storyline

Changing the child's and family's storyline is the focus of implementing the actions as set out in the plan. The delivery of resources and services is intended to assist the child and family achieve their goals. The delivery of resources and services to the child and family needs to be monitored to ensure they are working as intended in changing the storyline. Individual, family, and systemic barriers to changing the storyline are identified and addressed.

Establishing a new storyline

Establishing a new storyline with a child and family involves the regular review of progress toward achieving the agreed goals. Achievements are acknowledged and celebrated along the way, and areas needing improvement are identified. Over time, as aspects of a child's and family's situation are addressed, a new storyline starts to emerge. A new child and family storyline is established when the goals are achieved and the child and family are safe, strong and connected, and they are able to access their support network and obtain assistance when needed.

Practice Standards

The following standards provide guidance to organisations and staff in putting the framework into practice across the key phases of working with children and families –

STANDARD 1: Engaging the child, family and community

STANDARD 2: Identifying the storyline

STANDARD 3: Changing the storyline

STANDARD 4: Establishing a new storyline

STANDARD 1: Engaging the child and family

OUTCOMES

- Respectful relationships are established with children, families and communities.
- Children and families feel safe and respected.
- Children and families are supported to access services.

CONTEXT

- Children and families are more likely to engage with organisations that actively participate in their community, and are known to people and other services within their community.
- Children and families are more likely to engage with organisations when staff develop trusting relationships with them and they feel safe and respected.

PRACTICES | *Staff will:*

- actively promote understanding and knowledge of services provided by:
 - participating in community processes and events
 - networking with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations
 - other strategies including use of websites, pamphlets, word-of-mouth
- review referrals and identify the reasons children and families have been referred and their needs
- if the organisation is unable to assist referred children and families, provide information to the person making the referral about alternative sources of assistance
- identify the most appropriate way to make initial contact with the family e.g. phone, letter, face to face, introductions through another person/service provider
- share their knowledge of the purpose of the contact, the role and responsibilities of their organisation, any safety concerns identified in the referral and what services they offer
- listen to the child and family, facilitating the telling of their story and talking about how they may be able to assist them
- work with the child and family to identify relevant kin, community and country, and any cultural matters that must be considered
- encourage the child and family to bring a trusted support person to any interviews or meetings
- provide the child and family with written information about the organisation, service processes, their rights and responsibilities, confidentiality and privacy and how to provide feedback and make complaints
- persist in their efforts to engage children and families including identifying and addressing any barriers to their engagement

STANDARD 2: Identifying the storyline

OUTCOMES

- A shared appreciation of the child's and family's storyline so far is established.
- A support team is established.
- A plan for changing the child's and family's storyline, which builds on children's and families' strengths and addresses their underlying needs, is established.
- Children and families feel they have been actively involved in decision making.

CONTEXT

- Children and families are more likely to enter into a plan when they are central to its development, when it reflects their story, and when it builds on their strengths and addresses their underlying needs.

PRACTICES | *Staff will:*

- recognise, respect and affirm the resilience and strengths that children and families have already used in addressing the issues impacting their lives
- work with the child and family to explore their connections with kin, community, country and culture
- work with the child and family to identify the 'right people' including relevant kin, other community members and service providers who should be part of their support team and be involved in decision making
- consider the strengths and needs of children and families and respond holistically taking into account all aspects of their lives
- work collaboratively with children, families, kin and other service providers to identify safety concerns, strengths, underlying needs and plan appropriate interventions
- make other service providers aware of any cultural considerations in identifying safety concerns, underlying needs and plan appropriate interventions
- use culturally appropriate decision making processes to engage children, families and kin in developing and documenting the plan
- develop and document a plan including:
 - goals
 - actions required to achieve the goals
 - who is responsible for carrying out the goals
 - timeframes for carrying out the actions
 - how progress toward achieving the goals will be determined
- make goals and actions achievable and express them in a way that is meaningful to children and families
- identify and engage children's and families' informal and formal helping systems to provide support
- identify and address any gaps in children's and families' informal and formal helping systems
- address any gaps identified in children's and families' connections to community, country and culture
- where a child is unable to be safely cared for by their parents whilst action is being undertaken to address their needs and strengthen their capacity to provide appropriate care, work with the family, community and the Department to identify kin or other relevant community members who are able to provide care:
 - where kin or relevant community members are unable to provide care, work with the family, community and Department to identify Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander foster carers who are able to provide culturally appropriate care
 - where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander foster carers are unable to provide care, identify other care environments that can provide culturally appropriate care
 - where children are placed in non-Indigenous care environments, work with the carers, the Department and other service providers to ensure they are connected to their family, community, country and culture
- inform children, families and significant others of processes for making a complaint if they are unhappy with any part of the plan or the process of developing the plan

STANDARD 3: Changing the storyline

OUTCOMES

Actions are prioritised with the child and family, and resources and services are delivered to change their storyline.

Children, families and their support team identify what is working and what is not working or is missing.

Individual, family and systemic barriers to change are identified and addressed.

CONTEXT

Actions designed to ensure the safety and well being of children are more likely to be effective when services are provided flexibly, informal supports and networks are engaged, the efforts of all stakeholders are coordinated, and families are empowered to take responsibility for solutions.

PRACTICES | *Staff will:*

- purposefully implement the actions identified in the plan
- actively monitor the implementation of the plan and, if required, modify it to match the child's and families' changing needs
- support effective communication and collaboration between children, families, kin and community members, and service providers
- provide resources and services within the child's and family's home and community in accordance with their wishes
- encourage families to take increasing responsibility for putting in place actions identified within the plan
- coordinate the delivery of resources and services to the child and family in line with the agreed plan
- identify and address individual, family and systemic barriers to changing the storyline
- advocate on behalf of children and families to access the resources and services required to meet their needs
- actively involve children and families in monitoring progress and encourage their feedback on what is working and not working or missing
- acknowledge and celebrate the child's and family's successes
- maintain and, where necessary, strengthen children's and families' connections to kin, community, country and culture
- engage and/or build children's and families informal and formal support systems to sustain assistance over time
- reinforce with children and families that they can make a complaint if they are not happy about the services they are receiving or the actions of staff involved in providing services
- identify, document and report any concerns about a child's safety to the Department, and support the child and family during the investigation and assessment
- where a child is unable to be safely cared for by their parents whilst action is being undertaken to address their needs and strengthen their capacity to provide appropriate care, work with the family, community and the Department to:
 - find and assess kin or relevant community members who may be able to provide care for a child
 - recruit, train and assess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers
 - provide support to kin and foster carers including identifying additional needs in providing care to children
 - meet children's physical, emotional, cultural, educational, and developmental needs in out of home care, and/or advocate for their needs to be met
 - inform children of their rights in out of home care including their rights to make a complaint and appeal decisions

STANDARD 4: Establishing a new storyline

OUTCOMES

Progress toward achieving the goals is identified by children, family and their support team.

Children and families are connected to kin, community, country and culture.

Children are safe from harm, cared for and nurtured.

Families are strong and can provide a safe, secure, nurturing and culturally supportive home for their children.

Children and family feel they have achieved their goals and are able to access informal and formal supports to meet their ongoing needs.

Where families are unable to provide safe, secure, nurturing and culturally supportive care to their children, an appropriate alternative environment is secured to meet their needs.

CONTEXT

Positive outcomes for children and families are more likely to be achieved when progress is regularly reviewed against goals and when children, families and other stakeholders are actively involved in sharing their knowledge and learning through the review process.

PRACTICES | *Staff will:*

- regularly review progress toward achieving the goals and, where necessary, amend plans to reflect any change in the child's or family's situation
- actively involve children, families and other stakeholders in reviewing progress toward achieving the goals
- use culturally appropriate decision making processes to engage children, families and kin in reviewing the plan
- monitor that children's and families' connections to kin, community, country and culture are in place to assist the family sustain the safety and well being of their children
- monitor that informal and formal supports are in place to assist the family sustain the safety and well being of their children
- reinforce with children and families that they can make a complaint if they are not happy about the outcomes of reviews or the actions of staff involved in the review process
- at closure provide children and families with information about resources and services available and encourage them to recontact if they require any further assistance
- where children are unable to be reunified with their parents and remain in long term care
 - monitor their care, support and well being
 - maintain their connections to family, community, country and culture
 - provide ongoing support to kin and foster carers
 - reassess kin and foster carers at regular intervals
- link children transitioning from care to independence with family, kin and other caring community members who will support them over time
- ensure that complaints are responded to appropriately including that
 - they are followed up in a timely manner
 - support is provided to the child and/family during the process of inquiry
 - the child and/or family are informed of the outcomes of the complaint and, where, necessary, informed of other action they can take if they remain unhappy with the outcome
 - any actions relating to staff practice identified in the outcome of the complaint are implemented



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