

Respite Care

Time with another foster family

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BARRIERS**

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Being a foster carer has given me so much joy. It is really special to be part of someone's life journey and to care for and celebrate them. I have loved the network of people it has brought into my life, and of course, the new experiences and purpose it has given me.

[Lyndon](#)

Respite (or short break) care is a type of temporary foster care where children spend time with another foster family for a short period, typically to give their primary carers a break or “respite” from their caregiving responsibilities. Respite care aims to provide foster and kinship carers with time to rest, recharge, and attend to their own needs while ensuring that the child remains in a safe and supportive environment. Respite care is also an important part of extending the support network of children in care beyond their primary household, creating relationships we often think about as aunt, uncle or grandparent-type bonds.

Key Features of Respite Care

- **Short-Term** - Respite care usually lasts from a few days to a couple of weeks, depending on the needs of the foster family and the child in their care. It is usually a planned arrangement where the child temporarily stays with a respite carer before returning to their regular foster family. This often happens around weekends and school holidays.
- **Support for Primary Carers** - Being a foster or kinship carer can be emotionally and physically demanding, especially when caring for children with complex needs. Respite care gives carers time to rest, focus on their health, or attend to family matters, helping prevent burnout and ensure long-term sustainability in their caregiving role.

- **Stability for Children** - Respite care is designed to offer children a safe, caring environment while their primary carers take a break. It can also benefit children by allowing them to experience new environments and interact with other trusted adults. Expanding a child's support network helps offer them stability and security whilst in care.
- **Flexible Arrangements** - Respite care can be arranged regularly (e.g., once a month or during school holidays) or as needed, depending on the specific circumstances of the child and the foster family. It can also be used during emergencies, such as when a carer is ill or needs to attend an important event.
- **Children with Special Needs** - Respite care is especially valuable for foster families caring for children with physical disabilities, behavioural difficulties, or emotional trauma, as these children may require intensive care and attention. Respite offers a crucial break for the primary carers while giving the child continuity of care and a circuit breaker during stressful times.

Benefits of Respite Care

Regular respite care has many benefits for children in care and their regular carers. It can be a very rewarding type of care to provide a valuable relationship of support for everyone. Respite care can help:

Prevents Carer Burnout: Foster and kinship carers, particularly those caring for children with significant pain-based behaviours or disabilities, can experience exhaustion and stress. Respite care helps alleviate these pressures and keeps carers refreshed.

Supports Family Life: Foster carers may also have their own children or family commitments, who also benefit from opportunities for one-on-one time together. Respite care allows them to balance fostering with their personal lives, strengthening the overall well-being of the household.

Provides Variety for the Child: Respite care can give children new experiences, interactions, and activities that may be different from their usual routine, which can be a positive and enriching experience.

Helps Maintain Stability of Care Arrangement: By providing breaks for foster and kinship carers, respite care can help prevent placement breakdowns. When carers are well-supported, they are better able to provide long-term, stable care for children.

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It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning. I'd taken a 14-year-old boy [in my care] for a walk. His eyes just lit up. It was like he'd never been in nature before. He said, 'Thank you so much for bringing me to this place.' It's the simple things.

[Belinda](#)

Qualities of Respite Foster Carers

Respite carers are an important part of any care team around a child and have specific attributes that make them a reliable source of support. These are:

Flexibility: Respite carers need to be able to provide care for short-term stays, often on weekends or holidays, and for children of different ages and backgrounds.

Understanding and Empathy: Since respite care often involves caring for children with challenging behaviours or trauma, carers must have the patience and understanding to build trust quickly with the child.

Consistency: Although respite care is temporary, children still benefit from a predictable, structured environment. Respite carers should provide consistency and a stable routine during the child's stay. A strong connection and communicative relationship with a child's primary carers can help create that thread of consistency within care.

Fun : Respite care is when children and young people get a moment away from their regular schedules, the pressures of chores and homework, of keeping their room tidy and all the rest. While some routine consistency can be beneficial, it is also a time for fun and new experiences. Respite carers who are playful and enjoy sharing new experiences with children will do well.

Accepting: Children who attend regular respite are often those with additional behavioural challenges, disabilities or complex trauma. Respite carers who are accepting of a child where they are will help them develop the trusting and supportive relationships they need to feel safe and thrive. Especially when away from a regular home environment, children need to feel that they are safe to be themselves.

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She went from having no one safe in her life to having us full-time plus another carer for respite.

[Ashley and Scott](#)

When Respite Foster Care is used

Respite care can be organised in various ways but is best for children when organised rather than ad hoc and is built around a consistent and familiar relationship.

Regularly Scheduled Respite:

Sometimes respite care is arranged as a regular care arrangement, giving primary carers periodic breaks (e.g., one weekend a month).

Emergency Respite: In cases of unforeseen circumstances like illness, family emergencies, or urgent commitments, respite care can be arranged quickly as a support for families to manage the crisis they are going through and provide stability and support to the child in their care.

Holiday Care: Some foster carers use respite care during school holidays, especially if they have work or other commitments.

Considering becoming a Respite Carer?

If you're wondering if respite care is something you and your family might be able to take part in, you might be pleasantly surprised. Below, we've covered some of the things you might want to consider.

- **Part-Time Commitment:** Respite caring can be a great place to start if you are considering fostering and have a busy lifestyle or work commitments that prevent you from being able to consider other care types. Whilst respite caring is less frequent, we ask people to consider if they could be consistently available to a child or young person overtime to give them the best chance of forming important and supportive relationships.
- **Variety of Circumstances:** Whilst we recommend that longer-term care types consider the age of your own children and maintain the status quo, there is often scope for considering a greater range of arrangements within respite caring due to its temporary nature.

- Space in your home: Children still require a private space for sleeping when attending respite care. However, this might be a more flexible space in your home that can serve multiple purposes, such as a study come, bedroom, guest room, etc, rather than a specified bedroom only.
- Rewarding Relationships: Becoming a respite carer is an opportunity to provide children and young people with new connections, be a part of a supportive network for full-time carers and develop relationships with children and young people that are ultimately rewarding for you and your family.

Respite care provides essential support to foster and kinship carers by giving them breaks to rest, focus on self-care, or manage personal commitments while ensuring that children remain in a safe, nurturing environment with people with whom they can build connections. It helps foster carers maintain their well-being, which is crucial for providing long-term, stable care for children and young people. If you think you might be able to spend your weekends or holidays making a difference, get in touch.



If full-time foster care is not for you, respite caring is most definitely a viable option! On average, I connect with the family one weekend every six weeks. The contribution you can make, however frequent or less so, will go a long way to assist the child, the full-time carers and also the Life Without Barriers team.

[Raechel speaks about Respite Care](#)

[Raechel](#)

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Phone: 1300 592 227
Email: carers@lwb.org.au
Web: www.lwb.org.au/foster-care

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