

# Information for Muslim youth in out-of-home care





AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
*Equality without Exception*

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) is an organisation of Muslim women working to advance the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia. We believe Muslim women must be the impetus for change in their status as citizens.

The Australian Muslim community is characterised by diversity and hybridity, and not by a binding vision of Islam or what it means to be Muslim. We are therefore a non-religious organisation reflecting the sectarian, cultural and linguistic diversity within the Muslim community. We take a non-religious, non-sectarian approach to our work and adopt a social justice lens to Islam when it is used to justify any infringement against women. This allows us to work with all Muslim women. We believe that there is not one view of Islam that represents all Muslims in Australia and, further, that the diversity of Muslims in Australia is a strength.

We work for the rights of Muslim women by:

- empowering women's self-determination
- bringing a human rights approach to bear on issues of inequality and disadvantage
- working with individuals, the community, and government to advocate for equality within the Australian context

We aim to inspire positive action by others and aspire to continuously enhance the quality, impact and effectiveness of our work.

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Entering the out-of-home care (OOHC) system is often a very difficult time in the lives of young people. It can be even harder if you are placed in a setting that is very different to what you know.

Many young people feel worried, unsettled and upset. This is normal.

Sometimes it is hard to make sense of everything that is going on. The first thing to know is that you are not alone.

We have put together some information to help you understand some of the changes that might be happening now that you are about to be removed or might be removed from your home.

## This is likely to be what is happening ...

The person from Protective Services that is working with you is called your **caseworker**.

She or he will be developing a **care plan** for you. This means they will work with you to put together a plan about where you will live and what supports you need.

The overall goal of your care plan will be either:

- to work out how your family might be supported so that you are able to go back home

or

- to help you to become independent.

**You have a right to have a say in your care plan.**

## What is out-of-home care placement?

Out-of-home care placement can involve a number of different options. For example:

- Living with someone else from your family like an aunt or uncle or grandparents
- Living with another family that has been trained to look after children who have been removed from their family. Sometimes these families have looked after Muslim children in the past.
- Living in a house with other young people. These homes are supervised by support workers at all times. If the decision is made for you to go into one of these homes, you will be given your own room and you will live with other young people.

## How does your caseworker decide where you should go?

When making decisions, the most important goal of your caseworker is to keep you SAFE.

Your caseworker will help you to take part in deciding about where to go in out-of-home care by making sure that you understand all the information about decisions being made and by giving you every opportunity to express your views and to be heard.

Depending on your situation, there will be a number of options that your caseworker will discuss with you to help decide what is best for you.

**Remember it is your right to take part in any decisions and care plan that is developed for you.**

Your caseworker will:

- work with you to decide whether placement in out-of-home care is appropriate and necessary based on your safety and age
- work with you to decide whether another family member is able to look after you and if it is safe for you to live with them
- talk to you about:
  - whether it is safe to tell your parents where you are living
  - how you will be cared for and kept safe
  - cultural, religious, education and health needs
  - ways of letting your parents know how you are
  - what will happen next, especially if it involves courts and laws



- explain what you need to prepare for placement
- work with you to make sure you are able to collect things you will need
- take you to your out-of-home care placement and support you to meet your carers.

**Remember that your family's views regarding placement options may be taken into consideration.**

To help put together your care plan, your caseworker will consider and talk to you about the following things:

- your safety
- your family and social relationships
- your health
- ways you need to be supported and looked after.
- your education

By talking about these things, your caseworker will be able to work with you to make sure your needs are identified and responded to in the best way possible.

Your care plan should also include a cultural support plan.

## What is a cultural support plan?

A cultural support plan helps to make sure that while you are in placement, you are supported to keep your cultural identity in a way that is safe and meets your needs.

For example, you may want to stay in contact with family, friends and with your culture, religion and community. You may want to keep speaking your first language, and make sure you are eating the right food.

These are examples of things you might want included in your cultural support plan. You have a right to be able to access these if it is safe and possible for you to do so.

## Why is a cultural support plan important?

A cultural support plan is very important for some young people because it can help act as a bridge between your life at home and your time in out-of-home care.

A cultural support plan can help you stay who you are.

A cultural support plan can ensure you have access to things which are important or necessary to you. For example:

- staying connected to friends from your community
- having an interpreter if you need one
- making sure you are provided with the right food for you
- having your cultural or religious needs met

- being placed in a home where there are people who understand your cultural or religious background.

If you are a young Muslim woman you can request that your caseworker is a woman or that a home is found for you where you feel safe as a young woman.

Being taken away from your home and placed in another home is a time of great change and uncertainty. It can be helpful to maintain some of your regular cultural or religious routines if they are important to you. **It is your right to do this.**

## Common questions for young Muslims going into OOHC

As a young person in out-of-home care, you will have concerns and questions. Set out below are questions often asked by young Muslims who are in situations similar to yours.

Talking about your situation might be hard right now. Some of these answers may help.

### Am I the only Muslim kid to be removed from home?

No, you are not. Young people across all communities, including Muslim young people, are sometimes removed from home for their safety.

### I feel bad, like I have done something terrible to my family.

It's normal to feel guilty. Many young people feel like this and are worried that they are harming their families.



The fact that you have been removed from home means that there are serious concerns that your family may not currently be able to keep you healthy and well.

It is important to remember that you are not responsible for your mistreatment. Do not blame yourself. You have a right to be treated with love and care.

## **I'm worried I will never see my family again.**

The priority of your caseworker is to try to make sure you return to your family.

However, sometimes it is not possible because it may not be safe for you. Even if you cannot return to living with your family, you may be able to have visits with them.

Every situation is different and sometimes you have to wait until you are a bit older to visit. You will always have the support of a caseworker in sorting these things out.

## **Will I be able to see my community and friends again?**

This will depend on whether it is safe to do so.

If it is decided that you will be safe seeing your community and friends, your caseworker will help you to do this.



## Does my religion say I am bad for leaving my family?

Absolutely not. This is something a lot of young people hear.

Family and parents are highly respected in Islam. However, your safety, health and wellbeing as a young person is also extremely important.

Islam places great value in keeping children happy and healthy.

## Is it true that the Muslim community does not want Muslim youth who have left home?

Some people in the Muslim community do not understand the circumstances in which young people are removed from home. But many Muslims do understand that sometimes young people have to be removed from their family for their personal safety.

Many Muslims feel a great deal of care and support for young Muslims in this situation.

## Can I still be Muslim if I have left my family and community?

Absolutely. It is your fundamental right to decide to continue being Muslim. No-one can take this away from you. It is also up to you to decide how you want to be Muslim.

For most Muslims you will always have a place in the community.

## Can I still practise my faith while in out of home care?

Yes. It is your caseworker's role to ensure that you are able to have your religious needs met if that is important to you.

## What if I no longer want to be Muslim?

When removed from home, some young people no longer wish to be Muslim. They want to leave their family, culture and religion behind. This is also your right.

It is important that you receive support whatever you decide you want to do. It can be a very big change in your life at a time when there are already lots of big changes. Talking to someone you trust about this change can help you make a decision that is right for you.

## How some young people feel when they have been removed from home ...

Going into out-of-home care can be a very emotional time. It is normal to be feeling:

- afraid about your new situation and what will happen to you
- that you are around strangers with nobody you can relate to
- angry and confused about your family
- relieved about being removed from home
- upset about leaving brothers and sisters behind
- anxious about letting down your family and community
- depressed about leaving your family
- lonely and missing family members and friends
- sad and anxious because of the abuse you experienced
- worried about losing your cultural identity and connections.

Some young people also worry about:

- not being able to contact family
- not having a family to help them look after themselves
- relating to the people they are living with
- getting along with other students at a new school
- being able to keep their culture or religion
- finding people who speak their community language
- having the right foods
- having adults they can relate to and trust
- feeling unsafe around people they do not know
- looking different and feeling different
- being able to find people who understand them.

## You and your rights

As a young person in out-of-home care you have the right to participate in decisions about what's happening in your life. A Charter of Rights has been developed specifically for children and young people in out-of-home care. Remember, the charter is not just words - it has been authorised by government and needs to be respected by everybody who has a role in your care.

### Charter for children and young people in care

- to be safe and feel safe
- to stay healthy and well and go to a doctor, dentist or other professional for help when I need to
- to be allowed to be a child and be treated with respect
- to feel proud and strong in my own culture
- to have a say and be heard
- to be provided with information
- to tell someone if I am unhappy
- to know information about me will only be shared in order to help people look after me
- to have a worker who is there for me
- to keep in contact with my family, friends and people and places that matter to me
- careful thought being given to where I will live so I will have a home that feels like a home
- to have fun and do activities that I enjoy

- ☑ to be able to take part in family traditions and be able to learn about and be involved with cultural and religious groups that are important to me
- ☑ to be provided with the best possible education and training
- ☑ to be able to develop life skills and grow up to become the best person I can
- ☑ help in preparing myself to leave care and support after I leave care

### **As a Muslim young person this charter means you have the right to:**

- be treated with dignity and respect
- information about staying in touch with your faith community
- support to maintain faith and cultural traditions that are important to you
- feel safe in expressing your identity and practising your faith
- guidance to stay safe if you are in a new situation of independence
- information on positive and supportive community re-entry networks
- information and trusted people to talk to about your rights and responsibilities.

## If you need further help

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights is committed to supporting Muslim girls and young women in out-of-home care.

You can contact the Centre at any time on  
(03) 9481 3000



THE AUSTRALIAN  
MUSLIM WOMEN'S CENTRE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

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BENEVOLENCE

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ROSS HOUSE  
ASSOCIATION

### Care with Me, Ross House Association

Email: [melmasri@cwme.org.au](mailto:melmasri@cwme.org.au)

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ISLAMIC COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

### Islamic Council of Victoria

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