

Chapter 16

Out-of-home care – The ongoing challenge for legal and social systems to enhance children's welfare

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Chapter summary
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Key legislation
Social work practice to keep children out of care
Social workers cannot rely on low-intensity services
Crisis support services identify and help children in greatest need
Ongoing intensive support will then be required
Open adoption to move children from the care system
Social workers can increase a child's stability
Social workers can increase identity and a sense of belonging
Social workers can foster normalising experiences
Legislation allows adoption from care
Social work practice to support children in kin placements
Defining the social worker's role in kin care
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Chapter summary

The number of children living in care in Australia is steadily increasing and legal and social systems seem unable to affect the poor outcomes that children who have been removed from their families often experience. Social workers must find effective ways to keep children out of care or to identify safe 'exit points'. In this chapter we argue that the chronic and entrenched problems that many families experience can be best addressed if we move from 'early intervention' programs towards those that can deliver intensive crisis and longer term support. If care is inevitable, open adoption is one possibility that provides security for those children who require out-of-home care,

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Questions for consideration

1. Why are the numbers of children in out-of-home care continuing to rise despite increased spending on early intervention?
 2. Why is open adoption resisted so strongly by Australian social workers, depriving children who will never have a permanent family of that opportunity?
 3. What challenges are faced by relatives who are older and living in poverty in caring for children in their homes?
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Additional reading

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