

THE WAY WE CARE: CONVERSATION GUIDE

Protection comes through connection

This guide is for anyone who has watched *The Way We Care* and wants to continue the conversation. You don't need to work in child protection or social care for this film to resonate. It invites all of us to think about how we care for children and families as a society, and the part we each can play.

Use the questions that feel relevant to your group, or let the conversation go where it needs to.

What stood out?

What's one moment from the film that's stayed with you?

Did anything surprise you? Was there anything you didn't know before watching?

Did you learn anything that changed how you think about the out-of-home care system?



Why is this normalised?

The film shows a system that has existed in various forms for generations.

1. Jarrod says out-of-home care has been around for a long time, and reports keep coming out saying it is causing harm, whichever government is in. Why do you think it hasn't changed?
2. Jacob rang services asking for mental health support for Lachlan, and that call itself triggered a mandatory report to FACS (government child protection agency). What does it say about the system when a request for support can instead draw a family into the child protection system?
3. Beck says the system is designed to shame parents, and that shame shuts down a parent's belief in themselves, while children's voices are shut down even more. Have you seen shame being used instead of support, in this system or elsewhere.
4. Jarrod says one of the barriers is cultural: we've become afraid of connection and relationships. What do you think that fear is about? What would it cost us to let it go?

What does this say about us?

Child protection doesn't sit apart from the rest of society. The way the system treats children and families reflects how we think about risk, responsibility and trust.

Emily talks about wanting a system built around attachment, not protection.



What's the difference between those two words to you, and which one do you think our systems are actually built around, in child protection and elsewhere?

Bernie asks us to imagine what the system might look like if we put the people with lived experience in charge.

Who gets to make decisions about children and families right now, and who doesn't? What do you think a system designed by those who have lived it would look like?

Reflecting with REAL

REAL is a simple self-check developed by the Centre for Relational Care to help us notice how we are showing up in our relationships, and what we might do differently. It stands for Relationships, Empathy, Attitude and Language. You don't need to be a specialist to use it, just willing to notice, reflect and try.

R — Relationships

Am I building a genuine relationship here, or just managing a task?

E — Empathy

Am I trying to understand what's behind this behaviour or this moment, not just responding to it?

A — Attitude

What am I bringing into the room? Curiosity and warmth, or judgement?

L — Language

Does the language I use build connection, or does it distance and label?

Thinking back over this conversation, where do you sit with the four pillars in your own work, or in your own life? Which comes easiest, which is hardest?

Where in your day to day, whether at work or elsewhere, could you use REAL to check how you're showing up for someone?

What you can do now

Here are some ways to carry this thinking into what you do next.

- Talk about practical alternatives. Share what you've discussed with colleagues, leaders, local MPs and decision makers, why relational care matters, and what's possible. See our [short guide](#) to discussing an alternative Child Connection System.
- Think about a child or young person you know and ask yourself: how many safe adults are in this child or young person's life? You don't have to be the connection to make a difference. You can help strengthen their ties to family, culture, community, mentors and mates.
- Keep using REAL as an ongoing self-check, not just a one-off exercise. Explore [Am I being REAL?](#) and download a pdf of the [REAL self-check](#).

Need support?

The Way We Care explores experiences of childhood trauma, family separation and the out-of-home care system. It's normal for this film, and the conversations around it, to bring up difficult feelings or experiences. Whether you have lived experience, support children and families, or work within the sector, support and resources are available. Check in with each other after this session, and visit the Centre for Relational Care's [support page](#) if needed.

Stay involved

Join the Centre for Relational Care's webinars and Working Together spaces to help inform our ongoing work. Email us at change@centreforrelationalcare.org.au

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Explore the resources on our website like our [Knowledge Hub](#), [What is Relational Care?](#) and [What is a Child Connection System?](#)

