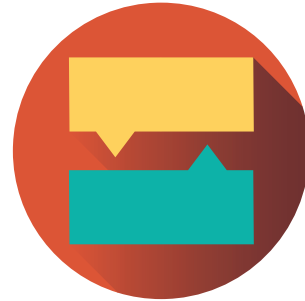


Access & contact with birth parents



Access refers to the right of biological parents or other relatives to have contact with a child who is currently (or was previously) in the care of Oranga Tamariki. It can be tricky to navigate, but we are here to support you.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Access orders are made under the *Oranga Tamariki Act 1989* and the *Care of Children Act 2004*.

WHAT DOES ACCESS LOOK LIKE?

Access can look different, depending on what is stated in the access order (also known as a contact order). It can include:

- Face-to-face (either supervised or unsupervised, depending on the access order)
- Phone calls
- Video calls
- Text messages or emails
- Letters.

WHO DETERMINES ACCESS?

If a court order is made, the judge is responsible for determining access and all associated legal agreements, such as supervision, transport, and costs, after hearing from all parties involved in the proceedings. If an access order does not cover a particular issue (e.g. transport arrangements), it is usually agreed upon by the parties involved.

In the absence of an access order, access is typically arranged by mutual agreement between the parties.

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WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

The child is under the care of Oranga Tamariki

Access is coordinated between the social worker and the biological parents. As caregiver, you can supervise access if you wish, but you might not feel comfortable doing so. It is quite normal to supervise access via phone, video call, email, or text, as often this takes place in your home.

You can advocate for access arrangements that fit into the child's routine, but the child's relationship with the parent often takes priority.

The social worker arranges transport and supervision of access (if required). You can also choose to transport the child to support them before, or after, access. If access impacts your routine, the social worker should arrange alternative transport. For trips over 40km, Oranga Tamariki may provide financial support for your travel. [See the entitlement here.](#)

If you have concerns about the child's safety during unsupervised access, please discuss your concerns with the social worker.

Please note, you are required to comply with the access agreement and support the child to attend meet-ups or engage in phone calls, etc.

I have *Care of Children Act* orders (Permanency)

The *Care of Children Act* orders will specify whether or not access is granted. If you have orders **with** access, these access arrangements are generally established during the Family Group Conference (FGC) process. Any agreements made during an FGC are legally binding. If an agreement is breached, you may suspend access until the mediation date. We recommend consulting a family court navigator or your lawyer for further advice.

If there is a dispute between yourself and the biological family, the Family Disputes Resolution (FDR) process may be used. If no resolution is reached, the matter can be taken to court. If you have guardianship and custody orders, you can request an FDR if the access arrangement is breached (e.g. the child is taken to another person's home without permission). Evidence is essential in these cases.

Permanent Caregiver Support Service

If your child was previously under the care of Oranga Tamariki, you will be eligible for the Permanent Caregiver Support Service (PCSS). PCSS support whānau connection and can talk to you about the needs of your young person and the impact that contact may have. They can discuss options such as having a social service provider to manage contact or, if the situation is threatening the welfare of the young person, they can give some advice about a change of legal orders.

I have permanent care of a child, but no guardianship or custody orders

If access is through a mutual agreement between parties, the wellbeing of the child and their wishes should be at the forefront of any access decisions made. There is not currently any financial support available to you for maintaining contact with birth parents, however if you would like further guidance, we are just a phone call away.

BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT / THERAPEUTIC GUIDANCE

Work with others involved to structure access visits in a way that prioritises your child's needs — access should always be about **what's best for them**. Whenever possible, allow some time afterward for your child to process the experience. Be present and listen carefully to their thoughts and feelings, validating their emotions with responses like, “Of course you're feeling that way.”

Consistency is important. If possible, try to arrange access on the same day, at the same place and time each visit. Predictability can help your child feel more secure. If access is supervised, see if the same supervisor can attend each time to help create a sense of stability and safety. If you have any concerns about your child's safety during access, immediately contact the child's Social Worker.

Pay close attention to any changes in your child's behaviour. These shifts may be subtle, especially if your child becomes quiet or withdrawn. **Behavioural changes** before and after access are common. Knowing that you can expect them helps you to feel prepared and respond appropriately. Behaviour is often a signal — they're telling you something. Stay curious, and gently explore these moments with your child using open-ended conversations.

If your child shows anger before or after visits, approach the situation with **empathy**. Help them manage their emotions without immediately jumping into questions. Remember, the child is in care for a reason — possibly due to trauma — and access visits can sometimes trigger difficult memories, or result in torn loyalties. Again, talk to a professional if you're worried.

If you are facilitating access, try to show some empathy toward the biological parents. These visits often serve as a painful reminder that their child has been removed. A simple, kind gesture — like reassuring them that you're doing your best to care for their child — can go a long way. Often, what they need to hear is, “I see how much you care, and I'm here to help.” In many cases, the biological parent may see you as the one standing between them and their child, so a little kindness can help ease that tension.

Ultimately, when we make access less stressful for the child, it becomes less stressful for everyone involved — especially you.

WE CAN SUPPORT YOU ON YOUR ACCESS JOURNEY

Everyone's situation is unique. If you would like support to understand your access arrangements and obligations, Caring Families Aotearoa is here to help. Contact your Regional Coordinator, or call our National Office on 0800 693 323.

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Caring Families Aotearoa (formerly Fostering Kids New Zealand) supports the thousands of children in care in Aotearoa, by supporting their caregivers.

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