

Practice Guide: Getting the most out of Student Support Group Meetings (SSGs)



Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present, and emerging traditional custodians and Elders of this country on which we work. The Centre also acknowledges the injustices and trauma suffered as a result of European settlement, the Stolen Generations, and other policies such as the forced removal of children from their families, communities, culture and land. We respect the resilience of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the face of this trauma and respect their right to, and aspiration for, self-determination and empowerment.

Practice Guide: Getting the most out of SSGs

This Practice Guide is intended to support professionals working with children and young people in Out-of-Home Care (OoHC) to better engage in Student Support Group (SSG) meetings consistent with the best interests of the child and young person involved.

All children and young people in OoHC are entitled to specific educational support under the *Out of Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement* (the Partnering Agreement). A Student Support Group, known as a Program Support Group in Catholic Schools, is a core component of the Partnering Agreement.

Key messages:

- An SSG is a team made of professionals including school staff, the child or young person, and their carer. The team works together to identify shared goals for the young person around their educational, health, social, cultural and emotional wellbeing needs.
- The SSG is responsible for developing, monitoring, and reviewing the Individual Education Plan (IEP), (called a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) in Catholic or Independent Schools)
- An SSG should be arranged by the school within one week of a young person entering care or starting at a new school. SSG meetings **should occur at least once per term**. Extra meetings can be requested or arranged if circumstances change.
- Schools are responsible for convening the SSG meeting, providing the invitation and agenda, and taking and distributing minutes.

Important note: An SSG meeting is distinct from a Care Team Meeting. The purpose of an SSG is to discuss the child's education. While the young person's engagement in school may support the stability of their placement while in care, this should not be the primary focus of discussion for the SSG. An SSG meeting is also distinct from a 'Parent Teacher Interview' and 'Student Led Conference'. If you're prompting the school for a meeting, be clear about the purpose of the meeting you're requesting, so the school is clear on what's expected and their responsibilities.

Attendees

While children and young people in care may have a large care team, and thus a large SSG, it is important that those convening a meeting give careful consideration when inviting people to attend.

It can be overwhelming for young people and carers to step into a meeting with a large number of professionals in attendance. Consider how the meetings might be made easier for children and young people and for carers. For example, consider:

- Discussing with the school who are the most appropriate people to be present in the meeting
- Inviting some professionals to send a written report providing an update rather than attending
- Holding a meeting for professionals prior to the SSG meeting.

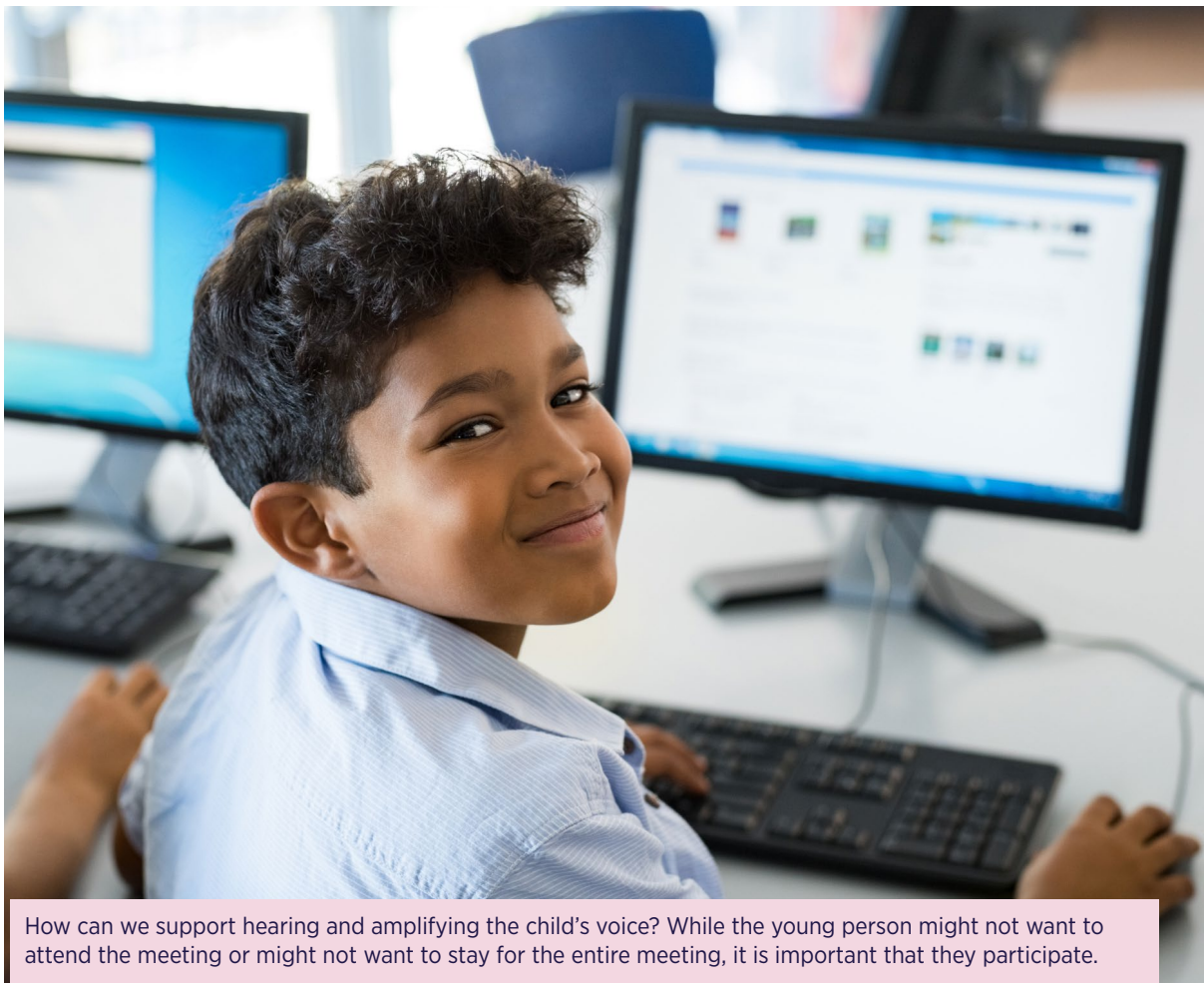
Child voice

Children and young people have the right to have a say in what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

While the young person might not want to attend the meeting or might not want to stay for the entire meeting, it is important that they participate. Think about ways to obtain their views and present this to the SSG.

A range of tools has been developed to support hearing the child's voice. Below are examples of worksheets and activities to support and encourage children to have their opinions heard in decision making.

- ACU has developed the [Kids Central Toolkit](#) which aims to provide workers and services with information, resources and tools to use child-centred approaches in their work with children, young people and families.
- [VACCA](#) has redeveloped five tools from the Kids Central Toolkit, including Child's Voice, specifically for Aboriginal children, which provides talking tips and guidance for using the tools with Aboriginal children.
- The Victorian Department of Education has developed the [Inclusive Student Voice Toolkit](#) which has a range of strategies and resources to support promoting student voice



How can we support hearing and amplifying the child's voice? While the young person might not want to attend the meeting or might not want to stay for the entire meeting, it is important that they participate.

Carer voice

Carers hold a unique perspective on and relationship with children and young people. The carer's expert opinion, views and perspective must be given as much weight and value as other professionals in the room. Carers will have differing levels of knowledge of school policy and differing levels of confidence in advocating for children in their care.

It is therefore important to consider various strategies to promote the carer's views and increase their confidence in contributing to meetings.

- Speak with the carer prior to the meeting about what they can expect and what they would like to raise as a concern or a celebration.
- Support the carer to write a list of questions or queries they want to raise in the meeting so it's accessible to them when they need it. We have provided a list of examples at the end of this document.
- Consult with the carer about which professionals, and how many, they are comfortable having present in an SSG meeting.
- Discuss whether the carer feels comfortable attending the school or if there is a more culturally appropriate or accessible venue where the meeting could be held.
- If required, schools can arrange for an interpreter to be present either in person or via phone link.
- Check in with the carer throughout the meeting to ensure they are comfortable with decisions being made, and are clear on all discussions. You can request that information is rephrased and promote less use of jargon to support the carer's understanding of discussions.

Parent voice

The voice and views of birth parents are also important to include where safe and appropriate to do so. Consider contact arrangements and plans for reunification when seeking their involvement in SSG meetings.



It is important to consider various strategies to promote the carer's views and increase their confidence in contributing to meetings. Check in with the carer throughout the meeting to ensure they are comfortable.



Supporting culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Recognising and embedding culturally safe and inclusive practices supports children, young people and their carers to engage in all aspects of education. This is especially important during SSG meetings to ensure the child and their carer feel empowered to raise their concerns, insights into planning, and ask questions.

- A Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) should be invited to the first SSG meeting.
- Consider ways to share information about culture and cultural activities with the school to support and celebrate cultural.
- Speak with the young person about what they're comfortable sharing with the school.

Supporting culture for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families

Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) children, young people and families have a wide range of needs. Building a strong rapport with the family is crucial to understanding these needs and how best to support them. Recognising that promoting the voice and individual identity of children, young people and carers is an important contributor to educational engagement, consider the following:

- Is an interpreter required? If the answer is yes, speak to the school to ensure an interpreter has been arranged for the meeting.
- Does the school sufficiently promote culturally inclusivity and safety?
- How might the child's culture be celebrated within the school?

Planning and preparation

The school should send invitees an agenda for the SSG meeting in advance. If someone who should be attending the meeting is not invited, contact the school to discuss further. This includes Child Protection Practitioners and contracted case managers).

Discuss the agenda items with the child (if appropriate) and carer, making sure they know what to expect when attending the meeting. This is a good opportunity to discuss any concerns or celebrations that the carer and young person may want to share during the meeting.

Strengths focused

While an SSG meeting is intended to discuss a young person's strengths and celebrate progress made towards goals, there may be times where challenges and difficulties are raised. If the meeting seems to be stuck on the young person's challenges and deficits, refer the meeting chair to the SSG meeting template and Individual Education Plan as a way to return the focus to a strengths-based approach.

- What are the child or young person's interests? How can these be used to support goals in the Individual Education Plan? What are some ways to explore a child's interests?
- Is there another opportunity to discuss concerns and ways to mitigate unsafe behaviour?
- Can we schedule another professionals' meeting specifically to discuss behavioural concerns that is separate from this SSG?



What are the child or young person's interests? How can these be used to support goals? It's important to discuss a young person's strengths and to celebrate progress made towards goals.

Discussion areas to consider

Careers conversations – not just for ‘leaving care’.

Research indicates children and young people with a care experience are more likely to be early school leavers, have higher rates of homelessness, and reduced earnings compared to their peers. While a career may seem a long way off for some children and young people, it's important that conversations about the future start when they are young, encouraging all children in care and those around them to have high aspirations.

Careers conversations are important to include at SSG meetings to promote both the young person's strengths and aspirations for the future. The conversations do not need to centre on 'what do you want to do when you grow up' but can include conversations about the young person's interests and opportunities available. The school can provide support through arranging a variety of workplace learning opportunities, such as work experience, structured workplace learning, and excursions.

Additionally, young people are able to complete a Career Action Plan from Year 7. The goals listed in the Career Action Plan should be integrated into the young person's Individual Education Plan, and reviewed in an SSG meeting. May want to include Morrisby assessment discussion too. Speak to the school's Career Advisor for more advice on Career Action Plans, work experience and pathways.

The Centre has developed [resources](#) to support career conversations, including a [quick links document](#) with useful resources to explore further education pathways and career opportunities.

Transitions

Transitions are a tricky time for any child or young person and can be amplified for children in care who may have had multiple placements and attended many schools. It is important that where possible SSG meetings take into consideration any impending transitions, for example from primary school to secondary school, or a P-9 college to a senior school.

During planned transitions, it is advisable to have additional SSG meetings, inviting the school staff from the future school to attend. At these SSG meetings, a coordinated approach can be developed where:

- The young person and carer can provide insights into what will support their transition.
- The young person may be given additional opportunities to visit their future school and familiarise themselves with the environment.
- School staff can share information regarding the young person's strengths, and any reasonable adjustments or strategies that may support their engagement in education.
- This also includes relevant information about any changes in care arrangements, changes of placement or reunification.

Support and guidance

What is a LOOKOUT Centre?

LOOKOUT Centres are multidisciplinary teams of experienced educators, support personnel and allied health staff led by a Principal. The Centres build the capability of schools, Child Protection practitioners, contracted case managers and carers to support children in care to achieve positive educational outcomes.

LOOKOUT Centres have specialist roles, including Koorie Cultural Advisors, Learning Advisors, Early Childhood Learning Advisors, Psychologists, Career Education Advisors and specialist advisors.

LOOKOUT Learning Advisors can support schools in implementing the Partnering Agreement, including processes and plans to support students, and support case managers and carers to navigate the education system.

When should you contact a LOOKOUT Centre?

Contact your local LOOKOUT Centre if you do not believe a school is providing the necessary supports for your child. Ideally, you should speak to the school's Principal first to address any concerns you have. If you are not satisfied with the school's response, you can contact the LOOKOUT Centre in your region for information and advice.

For information or advice, contact the LOOKOUT Centre in your region:

South Western Victoria Region

lookout.swv@education.vic.gov.au

South Eastern Victoria Region

lookout.sev@education.vic.gov.au

North Western Victoria Region

lookout.nwv@education.vic.gov.au

North Eastern Victoria Region

lookout.nev@education.vic.gov.au

Questions to ask & things to think about:

Who is the child's Learning Mentor, and what support can they provide?

Who is the designated teacher, and what support can you provide?

Who is the Koorie Education Support Officer, and what support can they provide?

Is Aboriginal history and culture embedded in the curriculum?

Does the school do an Acknowledgement of Country?

Has the child had an educational needs analysis completed in the past?

Who should the carer advise at the school if their child is absent?

(Reduced timetable)
What is the child's re-engagement goal and timeline?

Are there any learning supports available? This child needs help with _____.

Can we schedule the next SSG meeting today?

What are the child's strengths?

What are the child's aspirations for after they leave secondary school? How can these be encouraged?

Are there any after school activities the school runs?

What support is available for homework or tutoring?

How can their carer let you know if the child might have a rough day?

More questions & things to think about:

These things help
the child feel safe
and supported:
_____.

What are the
triggers (if any)
that may lead
to distressed
behaviours?

Who do I tell if
there are changes in
support eg: workers
or needs?

(Primary moving to
secondary)
Do you know when
secondary school
tours start at local
schools?

(Secondary school)
Has the child
started their career
action plan?

For more, visit
[cfecfw.asn.au/
education-
resource-hub](https://cfecfw.asn.au/education-resource-hub)

