



Department of
Education

Guidelines for education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements

Education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements

Section 5A of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (CCS Act) enables authorised Department of Education officers to enter into Responsible Parenting Agreements (Agreements) with parents in cases of persistent absence or where consistent breach of school discipline is occurring at school. Agreements outline the support to be provided to the parent by the Department and other agencies and the actions to be taken by the parent to improve the situation.

What are Responsible Parenting Agreements?

The purpose of Responsible Parenting Agreements is to help parents of children who display complex behaviour needs, are persistently absent from school without reasonable cause, or committing offences.

Authorised officers from the Departments of Education, Child Protection and Family Support and Corrective Services enter into Agreements to document actions to be taken by parents and the support services to be provided by these agencies.

Elements of an Agreement may include, but are not limited to, the parent(s):

- taking part in counselling or parenting skills training;
- taking reasonable steps to ensure their child attends school; and/or
- taking reasonable steps to ensure that their child avoids contact with particular people or places.

Education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements

Agreements are not intended to replace existing practice but provide an additional option for working with the parent(s) to bring about an improvement in behaviour and/or attendance.

Agreements are a supportive strategy and entry into a Responsible Parenting Agreement is voluntary.

Agreements should only be initiated by the Department where the:

- student is demonstrating, or at risk of developing, unacceptable behaviour at school or is persistently absent without reasonable explanation;
- principal has engaged with a relevant network or regional officer; and
- child is not in need of protection and care under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

Responsible Parenting Agreements in the case of criminal behaviour or anti-social behaviour in the community

These guidelines are specifically for education-related Agreements. However, schools may also participate in Agreements designed to address areas of criminal behaviour and anti-social behaviour in the community. In these cases the lead agency is likely to be the Department for Child Protection and Family Support or the Department of Corrective Services. The lead agency will take on the role of offering the Agreement and arranging support.

When to use Responsible Parenting Agreements

Agreements may be of use in cases where schools have attempted a range of school-based strategies to engage parents to improve their child's attendance or behaviour at school, but have been unsuccessful. Agreements are most likely to be effective where the parent wishes to address their child's persistent absence or consistent breaches of school discipline but requires significant support to do so.

Agreements may be entered into with a 'responsible person', being a parent of the child, or another person with whom the child usually resides and who provides day-to-day care for the child.

Agreements may assist in identifying the issues behind persistent absence or complex behaviour and develop a productive relationship with parents to address these issues. While entering into an Agreement is voluntary, the process provides a level of formality that may result in improved engagement between the parent and relevant agencies.

Prior to initiating an Agreement, the school must make a judgement about whether parenting is a significant factor in the student's persistent absence or behaviour. Consideration should also be given as to whether a parenting program would be an appropriate form of support and whether the parent can be engaged on a voluntary basis.

Arranging a meeting with parents to develop an Agreement

The school should arrange a meeting with the parent to discuss the student's behaviour or absence from school and any related issues. In contacting the parent, officers should give consideration to the best way to approach the parent, bearing in mind that some parents may find it harder to engage than others. Where the concern relates to persistent absence, the *Student Attendance* policy indicates that a Responsible Parenting Agreement may be considered as part of a formal meeting with a parent.

The school should ensure parents are clearly informed about the purpose of the Agreement.

Depending on the individual case, the student may also be invited to attend the meeting.

All written communication with parents should be easy to understand. For information on writing in plain English, see the Publications Writing Style Guide available from the Policies website at www.policies.det.wa.edu.au

Facilitating the meeting and the development of the Agreement

The facilitating officer should explain the purpose of the meeting and the Agreement and why it may be helpful. Every effort should be made to engage the parents in a collaborative, culturally sensitive and transparent manner.

The parent should be asked to outline their views on the student's behaviour and/or attendance at school, any underlying issues and how they believe these might be addressed. Parents may be unaware of the different types of support in the area so the officer should summarise the different types of support available.

Officers should explain to parents that an Agreement often includes one or more of the following requirements:

- The parents attending parenting guidance counselling, a parenting support group or any other relevant personal development course or group.
- The parents taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child attends school.

- The parents taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids contact with a particular person or persons.
- The parents taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids a particular place or places.
- Other matters relating to the effective parenting of the child.
- Assistance to be given to the parent or child by a government agency.

Responsibilities need to be clearly articulated, particularly where Standard Australian English is not the first language of the parents.

Determining the aim of the Agreement

Where persistent absence is the primary concern, the aim may include the parent ensuring the child attends school unless he or she is unwell or there is another acceptable reason for the absence. When disruptive behaviour at school is the primary concern, the aim may include the parent ensuring the child behaves in a way that is conducive to their own and others' learning. The Agreement should include the parent's commitment to a course of action that aims to support and strengthen their capacity to bring about the desired behaviour change in the child, such as participation in a parent education course or counselling.

Determining the strategies to be included in the Agreement

The strategies of the Agreement are smaller, sequenced steps that culminate in achieving the aim. Some strategies may run concurrently while some strategies may be contingent on the meeting of earlier strategies.

The breadth and range of strategies are negotiable and should be appropriate to the context and capacities of the parents. Timeframes should be appropriate to the availability of services in the community.

Useful supports might include parenting services such as those offered by the Department for Child Protection's Parent Support service, assistance with transport to and from school, enlisting the assistance of other family members, breakfast/lunch programs, provision of financial advice, drug and alcohol counselling, etc.

Schools should consider targeted interventions that might help the parent to improve their child's behaviour or attendance at school. In assessing the suitability of any counselling or guidance program, the facilitating officer should be prepared with information about which services provide such supports and whether there are particular cultural and social factors to be considered.

Writing the Agreement

Once the aim and strategies have been negotiated, the Agreement should be documented using the template Appendix A: *Responsible Parenting Agreement*. The Agreement should be written in a language that the parent can easily understand (translated where necessary).

It may take more than one meeting to draft the Agreement and schools may ask that specific agencies (such as ParentSupport) are involved in the process.

Term of the Agreement

The period covered by the Agreement can be anytime up to 12 months.

Signing the Agreement

Although principals or network or regional officers may work with parents and other agencies in the development of an Agreement, the region's authorised officer must sign the Agreement for it to comply with the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*. Authorised officers may wish to sign the Agreement as part of a formal meeting with the school and/or parents.

Authorised officers have been nominated by Regional Executive Directors and formally designated by the Director General. In most regions, the Coordinator Regional Services is the authorised officer.

The *Children and Community Services Act 2004* also requires the Agreement to be signed by the parent. If appropriate, an Agreement may also be signed by the agency or agencies undertaking to provide a service to the parent as part of an Agreement, or by the government agency that is agreeing to help the parent comply with the Agreement. It is recommended that the Agreement is also signed by the principal.

Reviewing the Agreement

The facilitating officer should:

- establish a review date for a signed Responsible Parenting Agreement;
- engage the signatories to the Agreement in the review of the Agreement; and
- decide at the review whether to continue, revise, or terminate the Agreement.

If a decision is made to continue the Agreement, collaboration with the parents should involve deciding which strategies need to be continued and, if appropriate, the development of a further set of strategies by which the aim can be realised. Authorised officers must be involved in the review.

The timing of a review should fit within the scheme of the strategies. It is recommended that a review occur a minimum of every three months. A review may be scheduled earlier if concerns exist.

Agencies may make recommendations to the review regarding the efficacy of their involvement in the strategies and attend a review, if appropriate.

If the documented strategies are not believed to be bringing the parent any closer to achieving the aim of the Agreement, the reasons need to be considered. If they have been tried and found ineffective then new strategies may need to be explored. If a lack of resources is contributing, such as a service being unavailable, other services should be considered.

This process of collaboration, activity and review should be led by the school and continue until the aim of the Agreement is achieved or the term of the Agreement expires (up to 12 months).

Ending the Responsible Parenting Agreement

Authorised officers must certify that the Responsible Parenting Agreement does not continue for a period longer than 12 months.

If the aim is achieved before three months a further review should be considered between three and six months later in order to sustain the change.

Concerns arising in the development of a Responsible Parenting Agreement

The parent(s) do not attend the meeting

If the parent fails to attend the meeting without good reason or notification, further attempts should be made to contact them and arrange a meeting. A letter would be appropriate in these circumstances, with a phone call or home visit as appropriate to the situation. All such attempts should be recorded.

Refusal or failure to respond to the offer of an Agreement

There is no requirement for a parent to enter into a Responsible Parenting Agreement. However officers should make all efforts to engage with the parent to negotiate this form of support if it is likely to be helpful. In cases of persistent absence, the offer and refusal of this particular strategy by a parent should be documented.

Non-compliance with the Agreement

The person responsible for case managing the Agreement should contact the parent in the most appropriate way to seek an explanation for each instance of non-compliance as soon as possible. Where the explanation seems reasonable and the Agreement is still proving useful, then this should be recorded and the Agreement should continue as normal. If the explanation shows that the Agreement is proving difficult to comply with through no fault of the parent, then a meeting should be arranged with the parent to review the Agreement and amend it.

If no explanation is given or the explanation is unsatisfactory, the school determine whether the non-compliance is undermining the Agreement to the extent that it is no longer useful, in which case the principal may seek to convene an Attendance Advisory Panel.

Child protection

If actual or potential child protection issues are identified during the development of an Agreement officers should refer to the Department's [Child Protection policy](#).

Reporting requirements

Authorised officers should forward a record of all Responsible Parenting Agreements established (including nil returns) to the Behaviour and Attendance Branch at the end of each school term. The Department of Education reports regularly to parliament on the total Responsible Parenting Agreements.

Terms and definitions used in this document

Authorised officer

A Department of Education officer who has been delegated by the Director General the purposes of section 5A of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* Act.

In most regions, the authorised officer is the Coordinator Regional Services.

Network or Regional officer

An officer attached to one of the Department's Education Regional Offices or identified by a network as taking on a consultative role for behaviour and/or attendance.

Parent

A parent is a person who has responsibility for the long-term care, welfare and development of the child; or the day-to-day care, welfare and development of the child.

Service agency

A person or body that has provided counselling to a parent under a Responsible Parenting Agreement. Where services are being provided, the agency may provide information to authorised officers upon request but are not required to do so.

Prescribed authority

A public authority prescribed in Section 3 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*, specifically:

- a department of the Public Service;
- a State agency or instrumentality; or
- a local government or regional local government.

Information sharing agencies include the Department of Education, Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Disability Services Commission, Department of Health, Department of Housing, Western Australian Police, Department of Corrective Services and the Department of Education Services.

Requesting information

The *Children and Community Services Act 2004* enables the CEO from prescribed authorities to request and disclose information if it is likely to be relevant to the wellbeing of a child or a class or group of children. The CEO of the prescribed authority may delegate these powers to an officer or employee.

Department of Education officers that may require these powers for the purpose of Agreements include principals, Coordinators Regional Services, Coordinators Regional Operations, and Regional Executive Directors.

Officers disclosing information should keep a record of each instance of disclosure.



Appendix A: Responsible Parenting Agreement

This Responsible Parenting Agreement is made under the auspices of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

This Agreement is between:

Name of authorised officer:	
Role:	
Region:	

and

Name of parent 1:	
Relationship to the child:	
Name of parent 2:	
Relationship to the child:	

Concerning

Name of child:	
Date of birth:	
School:	

Duration of the Agreement

Commencement date:	
Conclusion date:	
Outcome:	

Contact details and signatures

Authorised officer:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Signature of authorised officer:	

Parent 1:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Signature of parent 1:	

Parent 2:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Signature of parent 2:	

Other:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Signature:	

Behaviour/s giving rise to the Agreement

Name of child:	
Behaviour of concern:	
Anti-social:	
Criminal:	
Persistent absence from school	

Aim of the Agreement

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Strategies that support the aim

WHAT (Detail the strategies)	Action by Department of Education (Indicate who – e.g. authorised officer, principal, network or regional officer)	Action by parents	Timeframe

Agreement Review

Reviews will consider whether to:

- Continue (in which case existing strategies may need refining or new strategies determined);
- Complete (e.g. the Agreement has worked and the aim has been achieved).

Outcome at first review

Date:	
Signature of authorised officer:	

Outcome at second review

Date:	
Signature of authorised officer:	

Outcome at final review

Date:	
Signature of authorised officer:	