

HOW TO HELP THE CHILDREN FEEL WELCOME

DJ, Artie and Lily



DJ, Artie and Lily are being driven to their new foster carer's home by the caseworker. The children have been in an emergency foster carer placement, and now they are all moving to their restoration placement. The case plan is for the children to go home once FACS and the Court believe their mother can keep them safe.

The caseworker has told the children some details about their new foster carer June. They have seen pictures of her, and the house and back garden in the Welcome Book that June had made. June has a grown up son who has recently moved out. As they drive, DJ thinks: "I wonder what she's like? The caseworker says I get to have my own bedroom, which is awesome. I had to share the last one with the kids and it was tiny. I wonder why she wants foster kids, it better not be because she needs someone to do all the chores now that her kid's grown up and moved out. I'll be out of there as soon as she starts giving me orders.

She'd better not make a fuss if I wet the bed. Maybe in a new place, I'll wake up more and get to the toilet at night. Now I'm in a room of my own I won't be able to blame Artie for wetting the bed. I wonder what will happen if her kid wants to come back home and can't because I'm in his bedroom. I'll bet he's feeling mad at someone muscling into his family.

I wonder what I'll be doing tomorrow. I guess they'll tell me I have to go to school. Hope the uniform's blue – I've got my shorts from the old place, so I mightn't stand out too much. With my luck, they will all be wearing grey shorts and I'll stick out like a sore thumb again! At least it's almost the holidays. I wonder what mum's doing, I really miss her"

The caseworker pulls up in front of a house. June has obviously been watching for them. She comes down the front path and greets them at the car. She opens the back door for the children. She says "It's great to see you. I've been looking forward to meeting you all. Come inside and I'll show you around."

The caseworker and June help DJ, Artie and Lily with their luggage. Once inside, June shows the children to their bedrooms and tells them they can leave their things there. She says she knows their rooms look very bare at the moment, but they will be able to decorate it the way they want with posters. She also shows them the bathroom, and says if the door is shut, to knock before going in.

June checks out what the children would like to drink and gets out some morning tea. She sees DJ looking at a soccer ball in the corner of the room and says she has heard he is good at ball games. She says a couple of the neighbours have boys about his age and when they come home from school they might be up for a kick about.

June sees Artie looking at all the family photos on the dresser and she tells them who they all are. She asks the children who is in their family. The caseworker reminds DJ he has a family photo in his bag, and he brings it out for them to look at. June asks whether he wants to keep the photo in his room or put it on the dresser. DJ says he'll keep it himself, and June says she'll go to the shop tomorrow to make a copy so that Artie and Lily can have one in their room too.

The caseworker asks June what she had planned to do for the rest of the day, June says she has a few ideas, but it depends on DJ, Artie and Lily. "You might want to chill out around the house at first, or go for a walk down to the park or go shopping to get things you may need for your new school. We've got a meeting with the Principal tomorrow at 9am. I'll give you a bit of time to get settled before we choose together what to do?"

The caseworker leaves and June and the kids walk her to the car. As they walk back to the house together, June says "I'm very pleased you will be living with me. I've been looking forward to you all being here, but I guess it can be very confusing for you to come to a new house. Later on we can have some time to talk about different things, like meal times, what you like to eat, and what your dinner-time chores will be." DJ's ears pricked up at the mention of chores and he shouted "I'm not going to be your bloody slave you know" and ran into the house and locked himself into the bathroom. June remembered being told in her carer training that children may seem to overreact to small things, so she quickly settled the younger kids in front of the TV and then went to talk with DJ. She sat outside the bathroom and said "Hey DJ, you must be feeling really upset to lock yourself in here. I wonder if you think I'm expecting you to do all the chores in the house. That must have made you feel mad and sad. I'm so sorry that happened. I wish I could squeeze a 'sorry' under the door – but it's too big – can you open the door so I can give it to you properly?"

DJ unlocked the door. June waited. He opened it just a crack. June said “I’m really sorry DJ, let’s start again. Why don’t you come and watch TV with the kids and we can talk later about these things?” She asked DJ if he wanted a hug and he said “no thanks” Later on over lunch, June told the kids that she was happy to do all the cooking for them, as long as they would help with laying and clearing the table – that’s what she had meant by chores. She showed them the dishwasher, which they were all excited about, as at the last carers’ house they had to wash and dry the dishes by hand, which they all hated. June also told them that she knew that sometimes accidents happened and that if they ever accidentally broke any of the crockery they wouldn’t be in trouble. Artie started singing, “accidents happen now and again...” from his favourite TV program, Thomas the Tank Engine, and they all laughed.

Then June talked about some of the other rules in the house like knocking on her bedroom door and waiting for an answer before opening it, not watching TV unless June says it was ok, bedtimes and which snacks they are allowed to have with out asking (only fruit from the fruit bowl) and which ones they have to ask for. She also said she had put special under-sheets on all their beds so if they had any night time accidents it didn’t matter, they should wake her up and it would be easy for her to change the bed. She said they wouldn’t get into trouble. DJ felt really relieved when he heard that.

Caring for kids website

www.caring.childstory.nsw.gov.au

'How to help kids feel welcome'

DAY TO DAY DECISION MAKING

www.caring.childstory.nsw.gov.au

'Daily care'

How to help kids feel welcome:

- greet them at the door by their name
- giving a guided tour of your home
- showing them where they will sleep
- who to tell and what happens if they wet the bed
- showing them where the other family members sleep
- showing them the toilet
- showing them a picture of the people (and animals) who live in your house and telling them their names.

Don't forget to ask the children if there is anything they particularly want:

- for example a nightlight, to sleep with the door open or closed, their preference for a shower or bath, their favourite book or song.

Children also need to know how your household runs:

- any important house rules
- what do they have to ask permission for i.e. going into the garden, eating food from the pantry/fridge
- ways in and out of the house especially in the event of a fire
- who to ask for things
- the use of and rules around facilities, such as the pool, phone, TV, computer
- tea times, bed times, bath times, play times
- how jobs are shared
- who to tell if they feel sick
- what to do when they feel hungry
- where the toys are, and what they can and can't play with
- details of school attendance and transport
- time with family (contact) if known
- any special rules (for example around cooking)

Other things that are important for the child to know are:

- what if they have their own phone?

Speak to the caseworker for guidance around their use. Are they allowed to use their phone to contact their family? Is this in the court order?