



Billy Black

# Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

*The artist is a young person who grew up in care.*

*"The banner shows many pathways through the care system with a carer or caseworker acting as a guide, ultimately leading to independence for every young person. Whether we live with family or strangers, study, work, or just try our best, the paths we choose and are guided through in our youth are what we use to prepare ourselves for the happiest adulthood we can achieve" Billy Black*

## Children's relationships in out-of-home care

Professor Judy Cashmore and Dr Alan Taylor

Research Centre for Children & Families

# Acknowledgements



- **FACS** for the investment in research and leading the POCLS
- **I-view** who collected the data
- **Children and young people** who are participating in the study
- **Carers and birthparents** who are participating in the study
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- **Create Foundation, AbSec and Connecting Carers** for assisting during the study design stage and supporting participants
- **Stakeholders and experts** who have provided support, assistance and advice

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care>

# Children's relationships with their family and with their carers

To what extent do children maintain contact with their birth family and kinship network?

Children's socio-emotional well-being and their relationships with their birth family and kinship network

Managing problems – managing transitions

**The importance of 'belonging'** - someone who cares AND siblings

# Who is important in children's lives? Their relationships – their choices ...

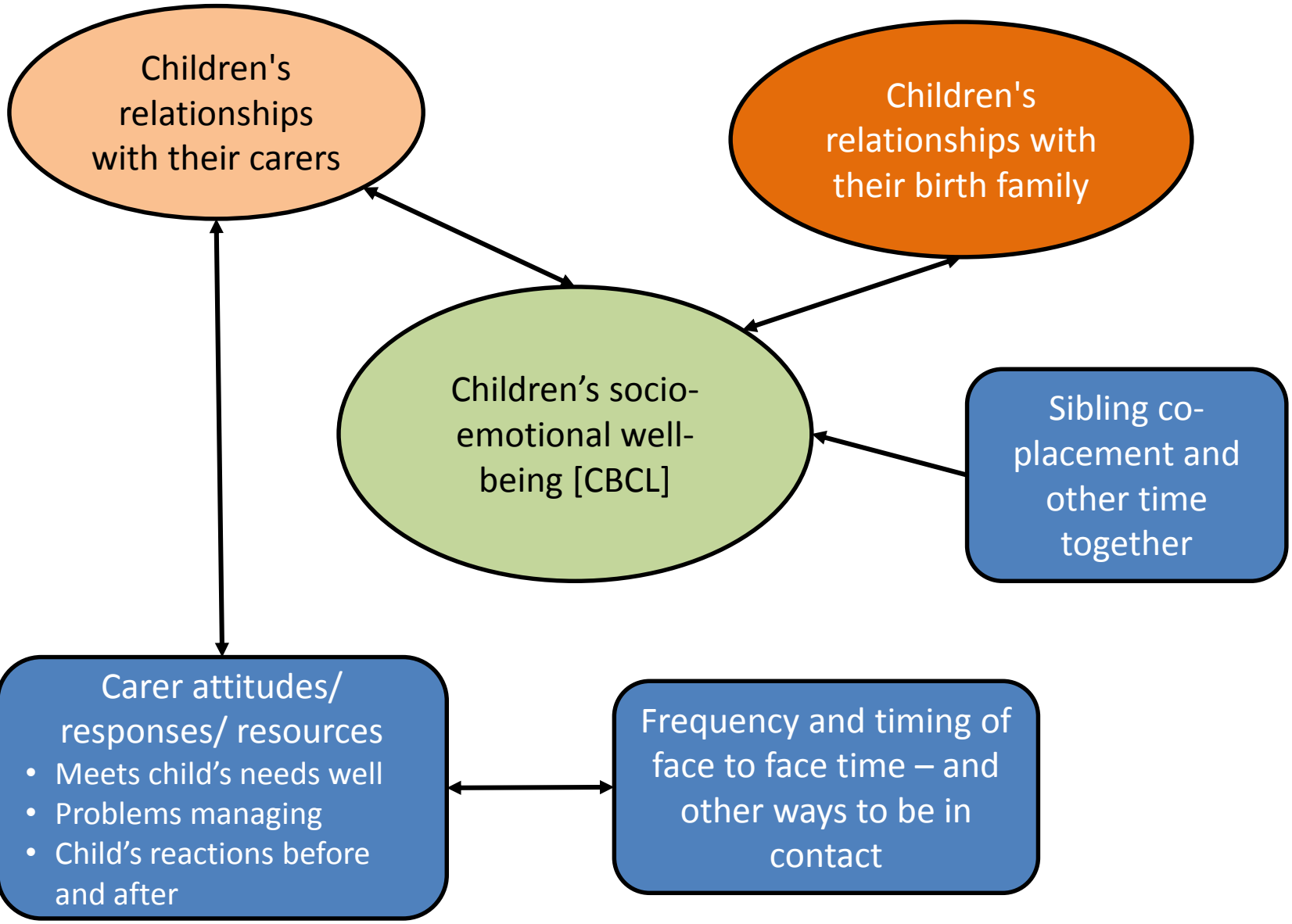
## *Leaving Care study*

- Best predictors of how well young people faring 4-5 years after leaving care:
  - number of supportive people they had around them and
  - having had somewhere they could call home /someone who loved them

Role of time with family..

Role of carer

Summative, not a a zero-sum game



Children's relationships with their carers

Children's relationships with their birth family

Children's socio-emotional well-being [CBCL]

Sibling co-placement and other time together

Carer attitudes/responses/resources

- Meets child's needs well
- Problems managing
- Child's reactions before and after

Frequency and timing of face to face time – and other ways to be in contact

# Consistent findings... What we knew/expected?

Children in **relative/kin care** *cf* children in **foster care:**

have more frequent face to face time (at least monthly) with parents, siblings, and with their grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins they were not living with

had contact with **more** family members across all waves

more likely to be living with siblings

more likely to have a good relationship with family members

Children more likely to have more frequent – at least monthly – face to face time with **siblings** than with other family members

## Consistent findings... What we knew/ expected?

**Fathers** are less likely to have contact with their children but it seems to be positive when it occurs – to some extent a selection effect but ... may also indicate that **more effort is needed to engage fathers.**

*Surprising:* Fathers were more likely to have **unsupervised** contact than mothers were – much more so when children in relative / kinship care – with their carers more positive re children's reactions than foster carers.

*Possible interpretations and implications:*

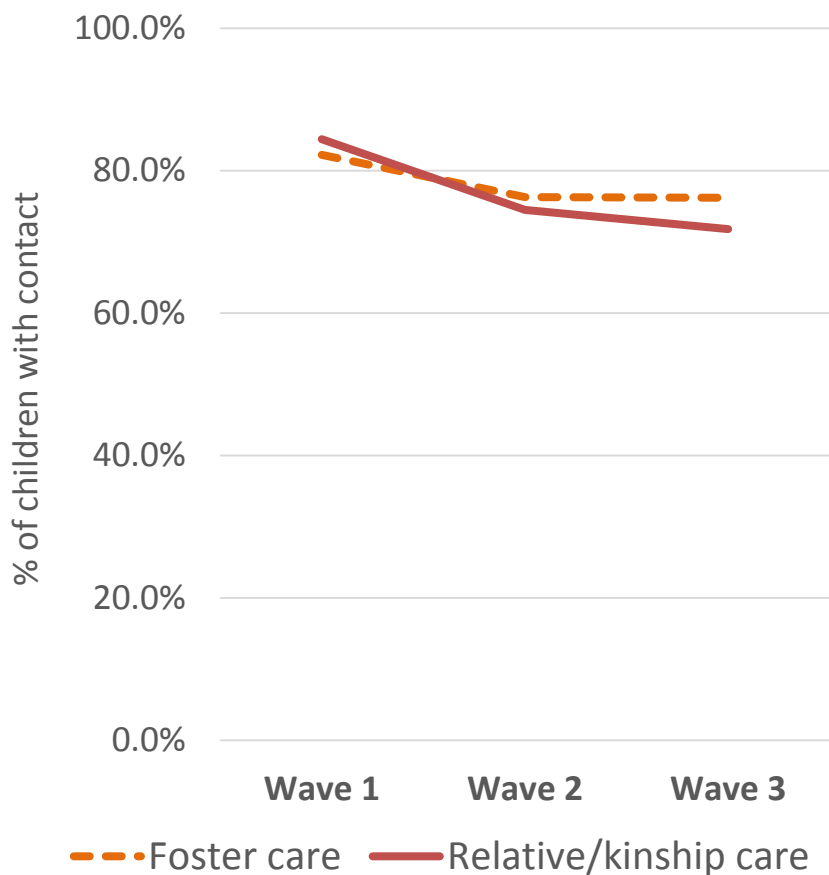
Invisibility of fathers in child welfare work; complex families

Fewer fathers with contact –selection – safety issue?

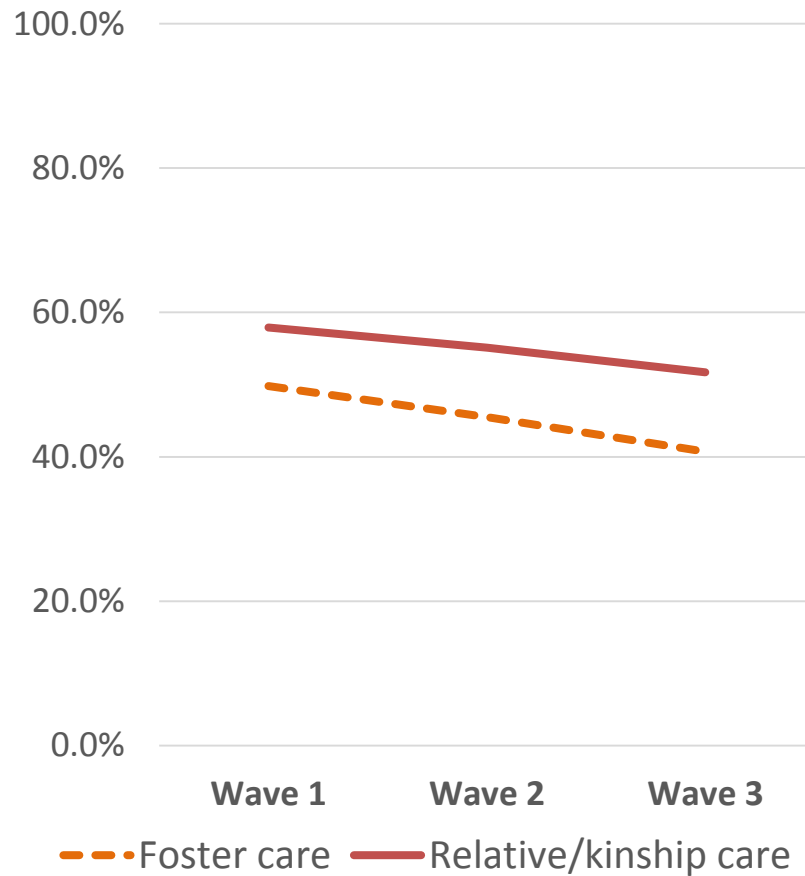
But relatives (paternal?)

# Children's face to face time with parents

## Contact with mother



## Contact with father

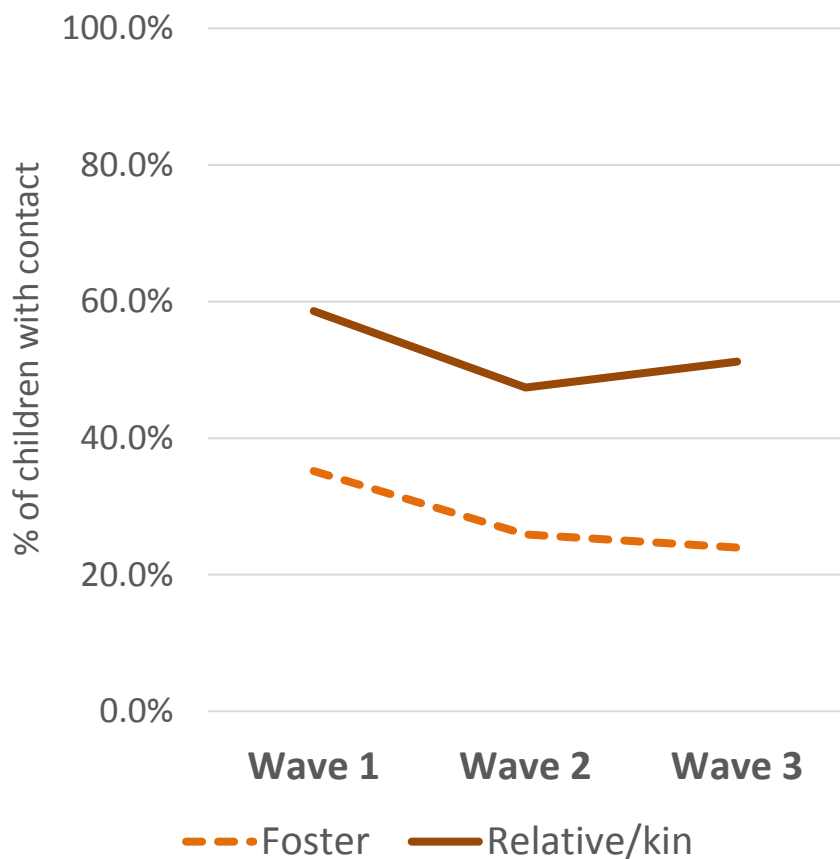


**Contact with neither parent – 10% to 20% by wave**

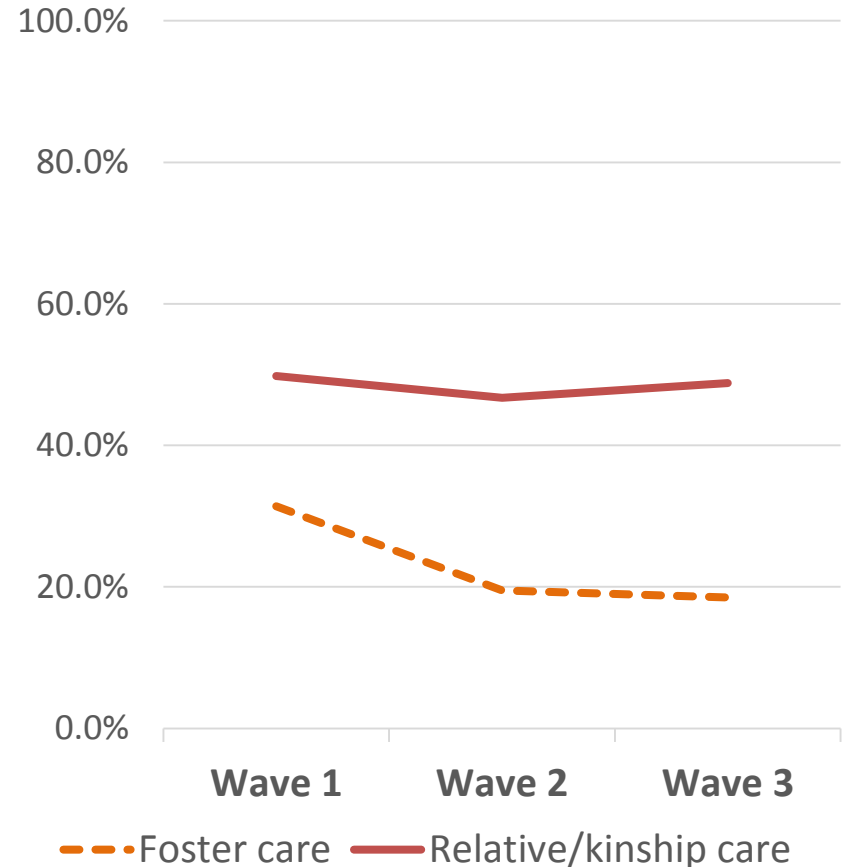


# At least monthly\* face to face time

## Contact with mother



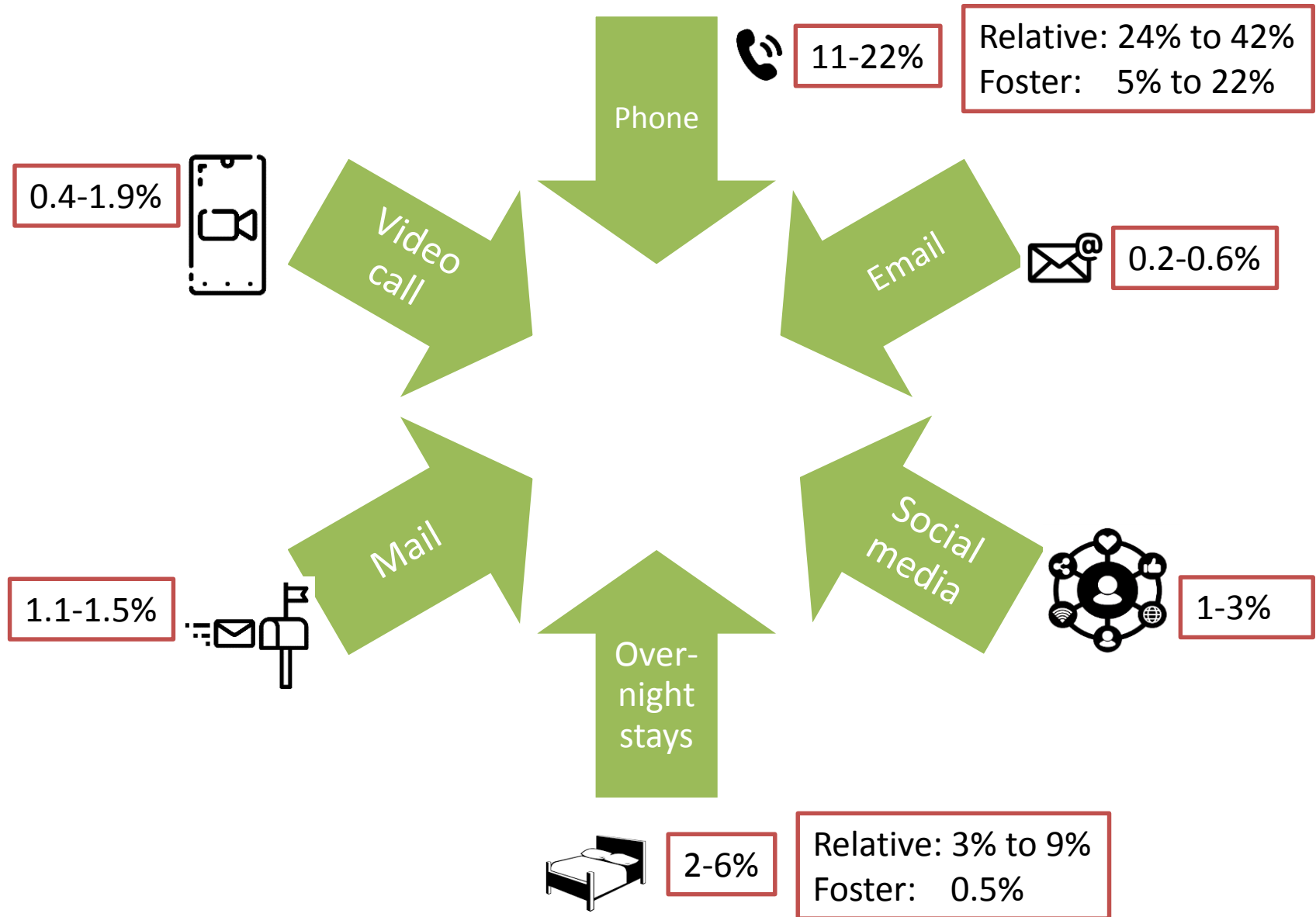
## Contact with father



Based on children in same households on all 3 waves.

\* Includes 'most days and 'at least weekly'

# Other means of 'contact' with parents and siblings



# Main findings – contact with siblings and other family members

- Children in relative/kinship care more likely to be co-resident with at least one sibling than those in foster care

<b>Children with co-resident siblings</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Relative/kin care</b>	386	64.5%	284	56.7%	176	60.8%
<b>Foster care</b>	360	54.5%	267	48.1%	246	50.9%

- Children more likely to have at least monthly face to face time with siblings (not living with) across waves than with other family members - in both relative/kin and foster care



# Carers' concerns about contact

The most common problems **at all 3 waves** were:

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- Parents cancelling or not 'showing up'
- Parents' behaviour problematic – kin > foster carers
- **Adverse impact on the child** – foster > kin carers
  - \* *Mentioned by 1 in 3 to 1 in 4 carers*
- **Hostility between birth parent/s and carer** – more in kinship care:
  - Kin – 15% to 11% (w1 – 3) *cf* foster care – 4% to 6% (w1 – 3)
- Time and distance: 10 – 18% (w1 – 3)
- Very few birth parents or children were reported to **not** want contact
- **Significant effects predicting higher CBCL scores**

# Carers' perception of family time

- 80% and 90% of carers indicated that contact was meeting the child's needs 'very well' or 'fairly well', **with the exception of foster carers of Aboriginal children**
- More relative/kin carers (as well as foster carers) indicated that the **child needed more frequent or consistent time** with family members than wanted less frequent time with their mother and father, and particularly with siblings.
- Carers' reports of the extent to which contact was meeting the child's needs for maintaining family relationships and the quality of those relationships were strongly and consistently associated with the *frequency of face to face time*.
- **Not surprising**.. selection effect but ... **possible feedback loop** ie more contact, more engagement, fewer problems

## Family time and children's socio-emotional development (CBCL scores)

Children who had time with *both* or *at least one parent* had better socio-emotional wellbeing (ie lower CBCL problem scores) than those who had contact with *neither* parent.

Children living with their siblings in the care household had significantly *lower* problems scores than those who were not, whether or not they had contact with siblings outside it.

Children in relative/kinship care had significantly *lower* CBCL total and externalising problem scores than children in foster care.

Children whose carers said 'contact' was meeting the needs of the children and not having an adverse impact on them had significantly lower CBCL scores.

# Relationships with carers and children's socio-emotional development (CBCL scores)

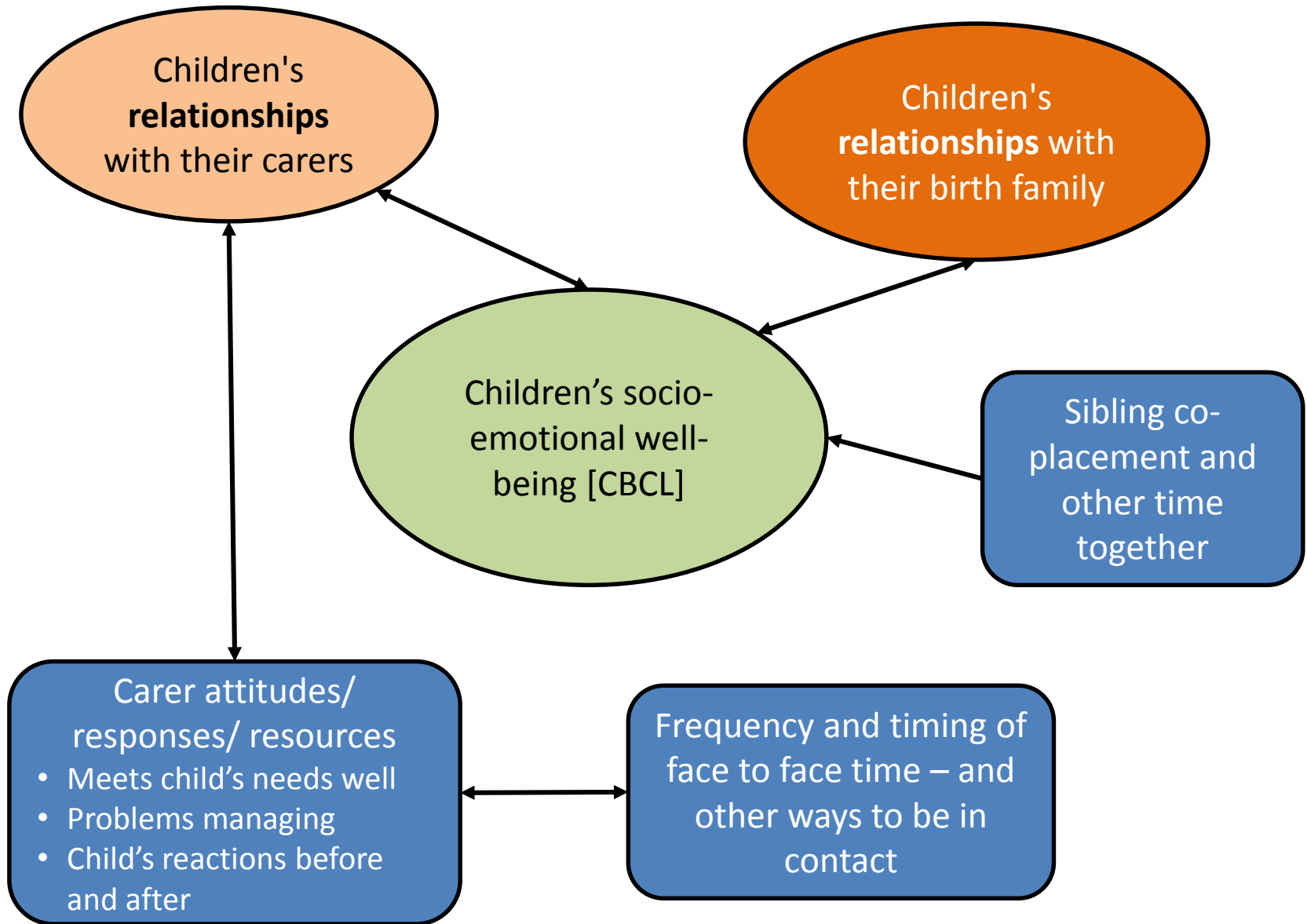
## *Children's ratings:*

- The more emotionally responsive children rated their carers to be, the lower their CBCL internalising scores as reported by their carers.
- Children who indicated they were very happy living in their current home also had lower externalising CBCL scores.

## *Carers' ratings re own parenting style:*

- Carers' self-reported warmth and hostile parenting style were significant predictors of children's CBCL scores.

**So coming back to the model: not zero sum game but cumulative**





# Policy and practice considerations

- **Appropriate, safe contact for children** with birth family members is **emotionally challenging** for children, birth parents and carers and does *not* just happen.
- **The participation of carers in face to face visits** appears to be associated with better outcomes but selection effect? And needs to be supported until all parties are comfortable with the arrangements
- **Both practical and casework support :**
  - to mitigate the difficulties of frayed relationships, and
  - the cost and burden of travel, and
  - taking place in comfortable, congenial locations.
- **Pay-off** in terms of the security of the placement and children's socio-emotional wellbeing.
- **Co-placement with siblings** – as long as it is safe and wanted.
- **Asking children if they are happy there...**