



Maintaining Children's Relationships in Early Permanence Placements

A good practice guide for managing family time

August 2023



The Concurrent Planning Service

delivered in partnership by Adoption Matters & Caritas Care

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Introduction



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Introduction

The Practice Standards for Early Permanence

The Early Permanence national standards devised by CoramBAAF are a set of standards that provide a framework to good practice and standardisation across all agencies. Standard 6 sets out six standards for maintaining significant relationships to support continuity for the child. These are:

1. The value to the child of maintaining significant relationships throughout an evolving life story is acknowledged by all involved in EP care planning and given due recognition in working practices.
2. Early Permanence carers are trained and helped to understand their role in supporting family time visits including meeting the parents when safe and possible to do so, and know who to contact should any issues arise.
3. Family time arrangements should be in the child's best interests and communicated clearly to EP carers and the family. Everyone should be clear of expectations on them including basic care responsibilities around family time, present giving, confidentiality etc.
4. Professionals supervising family time understand the value of direct and meaningful family time and are trained in early permanence, including managing the sensitivities of handovers between carers and family members and positive handling of the likely emotional anxieties.
5. When considering the use of digital technology (for example platforms for virtual meetings) for family time, LAs take into account emerging evidence for best working practices.
6. Where an EP carer goes on to adopt the child, they are supported to consider the benefits of, and promote significant relationships for the child.

The purpose of the resource pack

This resource pack is designed to be a practical guide for all workers facilitating early permanence family time. It is a guide for best practice, which LA's/ RAA's can use within their own resources and through following the guidance in this document, LA's should be able to evidence and meet standards as outlined above.

The purpose of this resource pack is to support practitioners to facilitate a good quality, warm and nurturing environment during family time. It will help establish positive relationships by handovers, which are safely and appropriately managed by family time workers. It will give family time workers the skills to support and facilitate a high-quality experience for children, their parents and carers by scaffolding relationships.

This resource pack will ensure consistency between RAA's and family time workers so early permanent family time is delivered in the best and consistent way to support parents and carers but ultimately to maintain a safe and positive experience for children.

This guide is designed to give some practical advice for managing contact. It is not an exhaustive list but some general hints and tips based on what we have found had worked well with our model. Each Local Authority will manage contact in a different way but hopefully the common themes of communication, consistency, relationships and empathy can be adopted in order to make family time within early permanence placements a positive experience for all involved.

The first part of the guide provides a summary of good practice whilst the appendices have tools that can be adapted and used by each individual authority as appropriate.

A charter/pledge is also included in the appendix that LA's can sign up to.

Definitions

The National Early Permanence Practice standards state:

Early Permanence (EP) is an umbrella term covering Concurrency and Fostering for Adoption placements. Both retain the potential for a child to be reunified to their family depending on specific care plans and circumstances and the outcome of the final court decision.

EP Carers are approved as adopters and also approved as foster carers (whether by dual approval mechanisms or Regulation 25a).

Family time – contact sessions for the child and parents/family during proceedings.

National early permanence practice standards - Coram Centre for Early Permanence - February 2023

The standards are available to download here: <https://earlypermanence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/National-Early-Permanence-Practice-Standards-DIGITAL.pdf>



Acronyms used in this guide

Acronyms used in this guide:

- EP Early Permanence
- FfA Fostering for Adoption
- CCP Concurrent Planning
- RAA Regional Adoption Agency
- LA Local Authority
- SSW Supervising Social Worker

Please note we have used both the older terminology of contact and the newer terminology of family time in the body of this guide.



A note about Early Permanence carers

Please be mindful that in most cases, EP carers are people who wish to adopt.

It is through training and additional preparation they can see the benefits for children in the provision of EP placements and therefore 'stretch' themselves to consider the fostering role. Alternatively, they could be kinship carers who are offering permanency for a family member/connected person. EP carers are not mainstream foster carers and need to be treated empathetically with additional consideration of this fact.

There is often high level of emotion involved in caring for children when there is uncertainty as to whether the child will remain with the carers permanently – they have additional challenges and uncertainties to negotiate that are inherent in EP placements, which needs to be kept in mind when supporting and working with these carers.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank and acknowledge the concurrent planning carers, social work colleagues and contact / family time workers whom we have consulted in the preparation of this guide.

Special thanks to Ruth Copson, University of East Anglia, who has kindly shared the findings of her yet unpublished research study into experiences of family time in early permanence placements. Some quotes used in this practice guide are from participants in the research study, cited with her permission. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

About the service and the model

The Concurrent Planning Service is a partnership between two Ofsted outstanding voluntary adoption agencies and registered charities, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care. Caritas Care is also an independent fostering agency.

The service was established in response to the Children and Families Act 2014, which stated that

“Local Authorities must now consider placing a child with adopters who have also been approved as foster carers” (Children and Families Act 2014, S.22)

The service was commissioned originally to provide concurrent planning placements for 13 Local Authorities in the North West and has subsequently grown to provide concurrent planning placements to the four Regional Adoption Agencies in the North West: Adoption Now, Adoption Counts, Together for Adoption and Adoption in Merseyside, consisting of 20 local authorities. **To date we have placed over 180 children with dually approved carers and believe we are the largest provider of Concurrent Planning placements nationally.**

We are a dedicated team consisting of social workers, social work assistants, contact supervisor and an administrator. We recruit, prepare, assess and support carers who wish to consider concurrent planning as a route to adoption. We use fostering and adoption as a way to achieve early permanence for children and concurrent planning is all we do. This model of service delivery really helps the team to develop skills, knowledge and expertise in early permanence.

The Concurrent Planning Service was set up initially with a specially designed contact service included as part of the commission. This service allowed contact to take place in a neutral venue. The contact was supervised by a worker from the service who was independent of the local authority and whilst the contact worker liaised closely with the child's social worker, parents found the independence and the opportunity to have their contact supervised by someone autonomous of the local authority beneficial. The contact service provided consistency of worker and venue throughout the assessment period and evidence collected through feedback showed that the model worked well and was well received by all involved. Feedback about the quality of the service provided was consistently excellent.

However, in addition to the placement fees, there was an added cost element for the contact service to the commissioning Local Authorities. As time went on, increasingly Local Authorities decided to facilitate family time themselves within their own in-house provision. Consequently, the supervision of family time sessions was subsequently removed from the contract when it was renewed in 2018.

Early Permanence carers have shared some of the challenges they experienced with regards to family time particularly in relation to inconsistency of worker, venue and timings for family time and confidentiality breaches. Such issues impact directly upon the child and make the process for carers and parents more challenging.

This good practice guide and training programme has been developed with funding awarded via National Early Permanence Working Group, sitting as part of the RAA Leaders Child's Journey Workstream. The group acknowledge that the careful management of contact is a skilled and crucial part of any Early Permanence Placement and in recognise the skills and experience of the Service in supporting family time, working with and supporting the LA's in the North West with provision this service.

About the authors

The authors of this report are all employed in the Concurrent Planning Service.

Lynda McAllister has many years' experience in facilitating contact in Concurrent Planning placements having been previously employed by Manchester Adoption Society in the Goodman Team (Concurrent Planning). Lynda has been employed by Caritas Care in the Concurrent Planning Service as a Contact Coordinator since 2014. Lynda is also an adoptive parent.

Caroline Cronshaw has been employed by Caritas Care since 2015, she worked as a contact supervisor in the Concurrent Planning Service between 2015 and 2019 when she moved to work with Caritas Care's Adoption Support Service.

Julie Hogan and Kate Knowles - Team Managers of the Concurrent Planning Service.

Julie Hogan has over 20 years' experience of working with children and families as a social worker and manager. Julie was previously employed by Manchester Adoption Society in the Goodman Team (Concurrent Planning) between 2006-2010. Julie has been employed by Adoption Matters in the Concurrent Planning Service since January 2015.

Kate Knowles has over 20 years' employment with Caritas Care with a background in fostering. Kate has been involved with Concurrent Planning since 2014 when the service was established.

www.adoptionmatters.org/ccp

www.caritascare.org.uk/adoption/concurrent-planning/



Background context

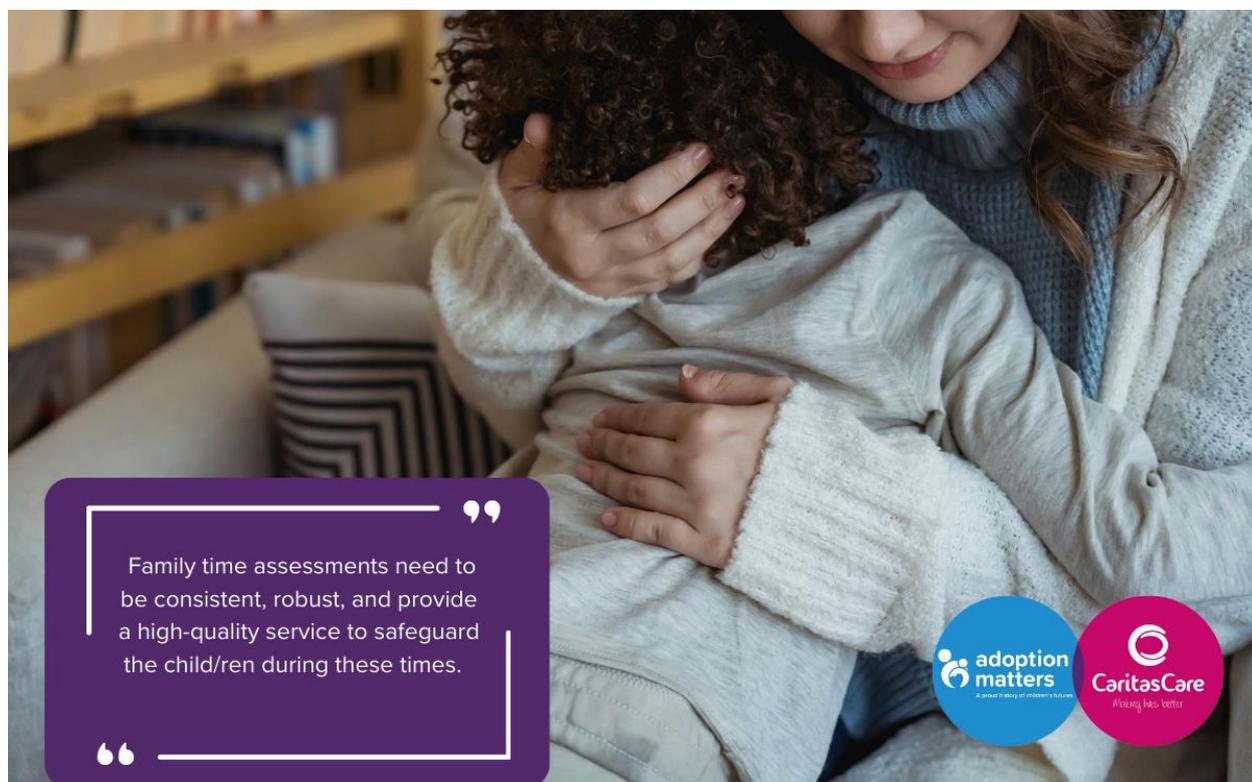
The reform of adoption in 2012, following the publication of 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' (DfE, 2011), aimed to improve outcomes for children in care by giving children as much security and consistency as possible, minimising delay and the number of changes of carer children within the care system experienced. It placed a duty on local authorities to consider placing a child with adopters who have also been approved as foster carers (Children and Families Act 2014, S.22).

Concurrent Planning (CCP) and Fostering for Adoption (FfA) placements both fall under the umbrella of Early Permanence (EP). Whilst there are some differences, both are essentially working with the same children and within the same legal processes. Whilst there may be additional uncertainties that carers experience in CCP placements, outcomes for children in both arrangements are hugely beneficial in minimising moves within the care system and broken relationships.

Children are placed with adopters who are also approved as foster carers whilst their future outcome is determined by the court. In these EP placements, it is the adults who face the uncertainties and not the child.

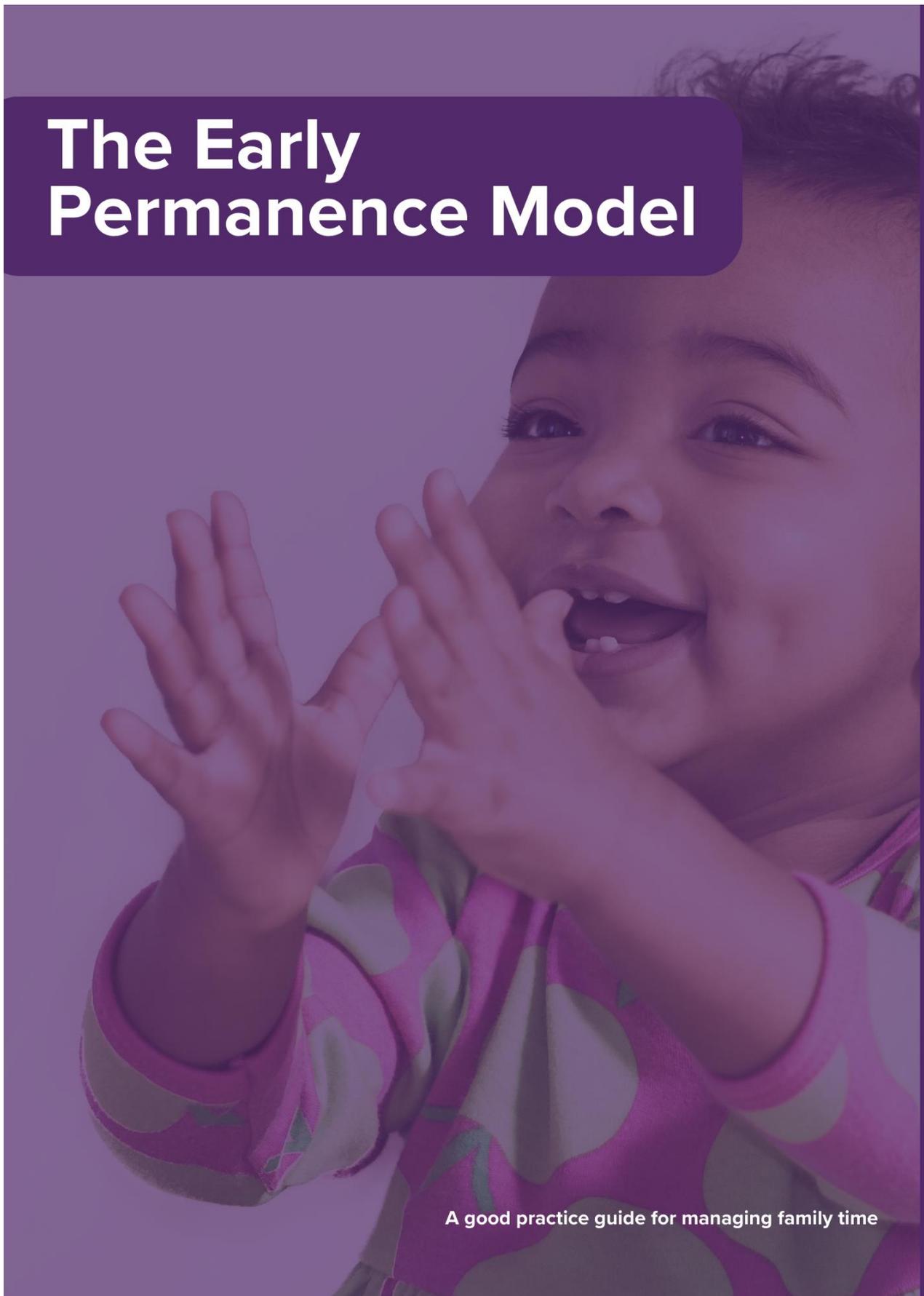
The Children Act 1989, states the importance of providing cared for children with the opportunity to maintain relationships with birth family through safe and positive family time as long as the child is safeguarded and family time promotes the child's welfare. Family time offers a unique and important role in the care proceedings as family time workers will be assessing the parents' practical abilities, emotional availability, commitment and willingness to accept help and advice.

Family time assessments need to be consistent, robust, and provide a high-quality service to safeguard the child/ren during these times.



Family time assessments need to be consistent, robust, and provide a high-quality service to safeguard the child/ren during these times.

The Early Permanence Model



A good practice guide for managing family time

The Early Permanence model

EP Placements, where the decision has not yet been taken by the courts whether to rehabilitate a child to their family of origin or to make an adoption order are extremely beneficial for the child. In all Early Permanence Placements, prospective carers should be well prepared to deal with uncertainty but also to manage family time between any child placed and their relatives.

However, the preparation and support for EP carers varies greatly between agencies. Challenges around contact can contribute to ongoing difficulties for all involved and EP carers need to be well prepared to facilitate family time between the child and their parents. As Neil (2010) states

'Where adoptive parents and birth relatives can relate to each other constructively, working together in the best interests of the child, contact is much more likely to be comfortable for the child.'

(p.92) and ultimately, the development of relationships between a child's parents and their carers can only benefit the child.

Family time that is well managed, consistent, supportive and well supported can be fundamental in establishing positive working relationships between a child's parents and carers, which we firmly believe can only benefit the child, whatever the outcome.

Benefits of developing relationships

Children's parents need support and encouragement to help them understand what Children's Services and the Courts require of them during contact/ family time and support to build a positive relationship with their child's carers. This relationship is beneficial for both parents and carers regardless of the outcome.

For parents they get to know the child's EP carers and if the child goes on to be adopted by them they have some insight and understanding into the care their child will receive and what their child's adopters are like as people, which can offer reassurance in the longer term.

We really appreciate what you are doing for our daughter, all our love and thanks.

Birth parents to CCP carers

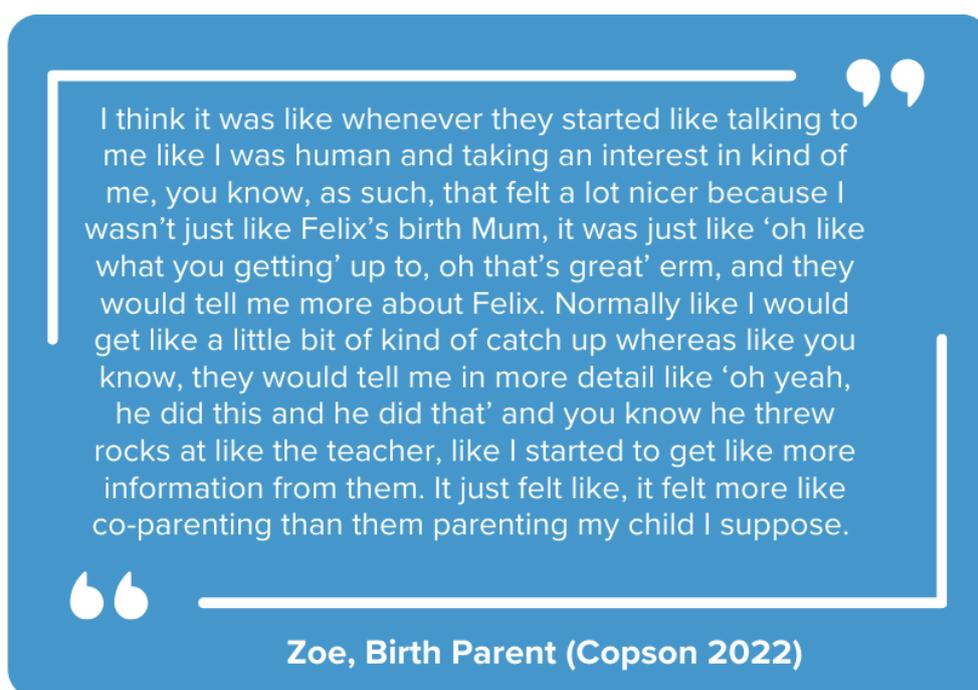
Knowing the relationship I have had with my daughter's adoptive parents for me has been better because...I have built a relationship with them, I have got to know who they are as people and I quite like them.

Birth mother whose daughter was adopted via CCP



For EP Carers they benefit from getting to know the child's parents in a non-judgemental context; if the child remains with them permanently, they can share information with the child on a personal level about their parents and family of origin, having gotten to know parents a little through attendance at contact.

Carers will have a better understanding of the child's parents, their personality, their life history and their journey based on direct experience and not just based on written information in the CPR or other documents. We also believe it helps the quality of any contact to the child's birth parents post adoption. If the child is to be reunited with the parent/s, the EP carers are often reassured by the relationship they have developed with them, they can see the progress made and in most cases are able to positively support a planned reunification and feel reassured.



Maintaining relationships

Children's relationships with their families must be maintained within Early Permanence placements and this guide works on the model **that it is better for the child if the Early Permanence carers facilitate family time by providing transport to and from contact sessions**. We also expect carers to provide a verbal handover to the child's parents at the beginning and the end of the contact session (unless it would be unsafe to do so). This model has been tried and tested in the North West and works well.

The model:

- provides the child with routine and consistency
- provides the child's parents with reassurance as to who is looking after their child *and*
- provides the EP carers with the opportunity to establish a relationship with the child's parents in a safe and supported environment.

The **benefits for the child** of this model are immense both during the fostering phase of the placement and beyond, should they go on to be adopted.

This is evidenced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Adoption and Permanence Inquiry' Strengthening Families Report¹ (Sept 2021):

“the inquiry heard of the important benefits that Early Permanence routes can provide, including the way in which many Early Permanence carers were often able to form a stronger relationship with a child's birth parents than they otherwise might through traditional adoption routes, due to the fostering role they play at the start. Social workers identified that with a high number of birth parents being care-experienced themselves, they often felt anxious about their child entering care given their own, often negative, experiences. Having regular contact with the birth family in the fostering phase allowed many Early Permanence carers to develop empathy with the birth parents, which facilitated a positive relationship. This not only enabled greater reassurance for the birth family about those caring for their children, either temporarily or permanently, but it also allowed Early Permanence carers to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the child's history, background, and the individuals involved in their life. This was recognised as invaluable for Life Story work further down the line and in navigating contact between the child and their birth family.”

Transport to contact

The findings of a recent survey by **Adoption UK** Commissioned by National RAA Leaders' Steering groups for Early Permanence Carers and Adopters (July - September 2022), identify that a significant proportion of EP carers are not taking children to contact with birth family members and are not providing handovers to family. **“65% of carers/adopters were taking the children within their care to contact with their birth family. Of these, 48% had direct contact themselves with the birth families”**.

Our experience of contact in concurrent planning is very different as all carers are expected to manage transport to and from contact and provide a handover to parents.

¹ APPG Strengthening Families Report:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ce657108ebdc40001702327/t/6152f529cf5b3a3851cd612d/1632826669745/APPG_Report_Strengthening_Families_Sept_21_Final.pdf

95% of our carers managing Concurrent Planning placements have provided handover to a child's parents. For the 5%² that have not met with parents, this in the main was due to the local authority advice about perceived 'risks'.

Adoption UK also reported

“For those not taken directly by carers/adopters, the most common ways for children to attend contact were via transport by a contact or support worker (29%) or via a combination of the parents³ meeting in a location for the contact worker to then take the child onto contact (27%). Many respondents in this survey commented that direct contact was not possible due to birth families circumstances and/or risk to the child”.

In their study on high frequency contact for infants in Australia, Humphreys and Kiraly (2010) highlighted concerns that the secure base a baby has with their caregivers may be severed when they are transported to contact with strangers, having a negative impact on attachment relationships for the child. We firmly believe, that it is more supportive for a child to be transported to and from contact by their primary care giver and trusted adult and that there are significant benefits for all involved of the carers taking the child to and from family time and facilitating a handover with their parent/s. This should be an expectation of EP carers. It is only in exceptional circumstances that CCP carers do not have some form of contact with the child's parents.

In circumstances where it is not considered 'safe' for the EP carer to handover to child's parents, they could still transport the child to/ from contact with some creativity in the planning, as once again it is better for the child to be transported by their carer to whom they are attached. Some of our carers have, and continue to manage complex contact arrangements where there are significant identified 'risks' due to involvement with criminal activity or unpredictable behaviours. In all cases, CCP carers have provided the transport to and from family time.



² This figure does not include children relinquished where parents have not wished to have contact

³ This is a direct quote from the report and the word parents is used as the people interviewed had gone onto adopt

It takes time in terms of additional preparation and higher levels of emotional support to enable carers to support this task. EP carers need to be well prepared from the outset to facilitate contact/family time (from the point that they attend the information event) and are expected to be able to manage this requirement. It is an integral part of an EP placement as children should be afforded routine and consistency.

Should carers feel that they cannot manage to facilitate contact and handovers with a child's parents then we would not take them forward for a CCP placement, this is an important consideration for the assessing social workers. It would be beneficial for all EP carers to have EP specific training and preparation in the assessment stage.

Good Practice - minimising inconsistencies



We have had experience of using this model for contact since 2014 and it is a model that LA's in the North West aim to replicate when working with our service. Nationally, there are inconsistencies between local authorities in maintaining children's relationships in early permanence placements and this guide seeks to minimise those inconsistencies. Whilst we recognise the challenges faced by busy LA contact centres, through adopting this model in supporting family time prioritises the needs of the child and improves outcomes for all.

As well as having immense benefits to EP placements, this good practice model will be advantageous for training LA contact/ family time workers involved in contact supervision generally as many of the principles also apply to contact for children who may be in mainstream foster placements and not just EP.

EP carers should be thoroughly prepared to manage high levels of uncertainty and should expect to facilitate family time between children and their families. This can be challenging and EP carers may need higher levels of emotional support from their social worker in order to manage this expectation.

When I first met the carers I was a bit nervous at first as to what they were like but when I first got to know them they seemed like really nice genuine people and then as I got to know them more on regular basis I started to build up a little bit of a relationship with them and I knew that whatever the outcome my daughter would be in safe hands.

CCP Birth Parent

Openness, transparency and respect are crucial in establishing and scaffolding relationships between EP carers and parents and as such it is our firm belief that parents need to be aware from the earliest opportunity that their child has been placed in an EP placement and what this means.

Information for parents

Appendix 1 has information that we share with parents when their child is placed, that could be easily adapted to be used by your local authority. It is important that we set up any relationships between carers and parents openly and honestly and parents need to know that if their child cannot return to their care, that the carers may go onto adopt them.

Experiences of contact from an experienced EP carer who has recently had a second child placed for adoption via EP.

Context

I have experienced 2 periods of contact, one lasting 9 months (placement 1), one lasting 15 months (placement 2), with 2 different children, in 2 different local authorities.

What has worked well?

Placement 1: Same room, same supervising staff and same drop off/collection protocol each time. This helps everyone involved to feel settled, especially the young child.

Placement 2: Supervisor observed parents with child but also appeared to advise and help parents with the parenting task, teaching them skills for example making up a bottle.

What has been a challenge?

Placement 1: A different room each time, sometimes in a different centre or even out in the community, a different member of staff each time (1 from a team of about 7).

Placement 2: Supervisors didn't appear to intervene, leaving foster carers concerned about the care of the child during the session. For example, allowing 14-month-old to eat a whole Cadburys creme egg; putting a 12-month-old into a remote-controlled toy sports car being driven down the corridor of the contact centre, bashing into walls etc.

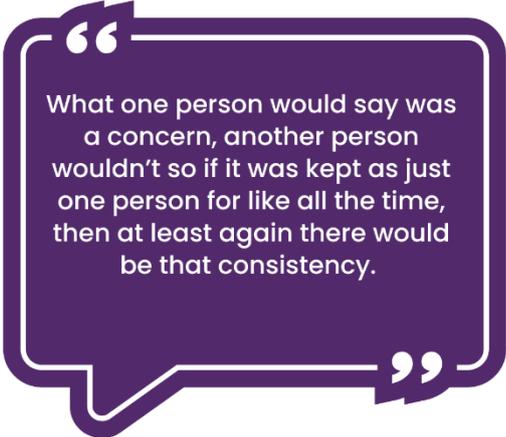
Where the LA can improve?

- Involve contact supervisors, foster carers and their supervising social workers in agreeing parameters for the family times from the offset, so everyone is on the 'same page'. For example, where handover will take place (in the room or in the corridor).
- Minimise the number of different contact supervisors for a particular child.
- Stick to agreed parameters rather than being too flexible regarding last minute requests from birth parents. For example, letting several unknown and unannounced family members into contact sessions, allowing community visits to take place without an up to date risk assessment.

Consistency

Consistency of worker and venue when it comes to family times is highly beneficial as all parties involved will be able to develop a positive and supportive relationships with the supervisor.

This helps parents to feel supported and offers children reassurance and can minimise inconsistencies with communication and expectations. This model is based on there being a consistent contact worker (or a very small team of 2/3 workers) and a consistent venue.



“What one person would say was a concern, another person wouldn't so if it was kept as just one person for like all the time, then at least again there would be that consistency.”

Birth Parent Contact in Early Permanence
Ruth Copson (UEA)

Confidentiality

Contact in EP placements is a little different to the standard support and supervision of contact in mainstream foster care. The confidentiality of the EP carers needs to be preserved as they could potentially become the child's prospective adopters and as such, they should have some of the anonymity that is more common practice in adoptive placements. It is for this reason that we advise that the carers' first names only are shared and the placement address and geographical location of the placement is not shared. This is a different approach to many mainstream foster placements when parents will often have the address of where their child is placed and foster carers maybe expected to facilitate contact whether it be direct or indirect.

In EP placements, carers should never be asked to supervise contact and our advice is that they should not be left alone with the child's parents, instead carers and parents need to be supported at all times to develop positive relationships. For this reason, we do not advise parents accompanying carers to the car with the child at the end of contact.

We advocate that following the handover at the end of contact:

- 1) carer leaves with the child**
- 2) parent remains behind in the contact room**
- 3) contact worker provides parent with feedback on the session**

The reason for this is twofold – the parents need to know what went well and what they need to work on next session and it also enable to the carers to leave the venue without parents being present or bumping into each other.

We have found that there have been increased incidences of breaches of confidentiality since contact has been facilitated in house and therefore suggest that some things to be mindful of include:

- Advise carers that when signing in at venues or introducing themselves at a meeting to just share first names only.
- Advise carers to think about where to park their car when coming to contact and try to park somewhere that is not visible from the contact room. Carers with identifying number plates may need to consider this.
- The red book is the child's health record. Health professionals will record information in this book and carers need to ensure that their surname and address and location of the child's health centre/ health visitor etc is not recorded in this book.

If the red book is shared with parents at contact the worker may intercept and ask to see the book first to ensure confidentiality is not inadvertently breached.

- When writing in the communication diary carers should be advised to use information and share any activities the child has done but not name places visited.
- If the child is taking medication or formula on prescription, advise carers to ensure all identifying details are to be blanked out i.e. name/location of the pharmacy.
- We recommend that carers use a separate changing bag for contact and that this bag is only used for family time – that way the risks of leaving anything identifying in the bag when out and about (receipts, letters etc) is greatly reduced.
- Family time workers also need to be aware of parents asking carers personal questions. Family time workers should be prepared to intervene and be mindful themselves not to ask questions that could disclose the location of the placement for example asking how the traffic was on a certain road.





Confidentiality

Impact of a data breach on carers

Shared by CCP carers

Whilst not directly related to family time, there are particular issues with documents being shared containing carers details, including court documents. Health Services have also breached confidentiality on a number of occasions and such breaches have been serious. It is important that all professionals involved with the child are aware that whilst initially placed under fostering regs, this is potentially an adoptive placement and should be treated as such in terms of confidentiality.

“

Initially the feeling was of shock / disbelief. Our training and preparation for us taking on a child and the constant talk about confidentiality being so important and that all of our details were completely secure and confidential was something we took for granted really. There were times where we were extra vigilant, such as removing the abbreviation of the GP Practice in the red health care book and overwriting with simply 'GP' so not give any clues away as to where we lived. For that to be totally in vain because someone with no direct link to us ...sharing our information felt like the system had completely let us down and that complacency had taken over.

After the initial shock / disbelief, it was the realisation as to what information had actually been shared. We knew it was [legal document], but no one could tell us what the document contained, how much information it contained and how much information about our family, our circumstances and our wider family and friends information it contained.

The first week or so was horrible, knocks at the door late at night that worried us as to who was there. Our garden runs along a footpath, and people we didn't recognise walking the path and us getting suspicious and anxious about the girls playing in their / our own back garden and us being worried about them being watched or spoken to by someone that had gotten hold of our information. It made us extremely angry and worried for some time.

The overall fear was regarding birth mother and her partner getting access to our details and turning up unannounced to see [Child]. It was clear all the way through proceedings that they did not want [their child] to be adopted, and further to this [birth father] has a history of violence, with several GBH / ABH convictions to his name.

”

A good practice guide for managing family time

The role of the family time worker

The role of the family time worker is both multi-faceted and skilled and this role is vital in

- maintaining children's relationships in early permanence placements,
- ensuring family time is child centred and a positive experience for all
- managing the complex emotions of everyone involved;
- communicating effectively between the parents, the carers and social workers.

In order to do this, family time workers need to offer support, advice, and guidance in order to give the child's parents the best possible chance of developing their parenting skills, evidencing their ability to meet their child's needs and thus having the opportunity of having their child returned to their care.

The relationships that the family time worker builds with a child's parents can be beneficial in supporting them informally through the challenges of care proceedings, supporting time spent with their child and helping to build confidence and develop child care skills. The family time worker also manages and oversees the developing relationship between parents and carers at handover. They are often the link between parents and social workers and vital in the sharing of information between all involved with the child.

In a study of contact in early permanence cases, Copson (2022) identified that the role of the family time worker is crucial in helping to develop relationships between parents and carers, scaffolding and supporting the relationships between the two. The role of the family time worker is a very skilled and responsible position, essential in ensuring that family time is child focussed and beneficial in maintaining children's relationships with their families.

However, when undertaking focus groups for this guide, it was apparent that the expectations of family time workers vary greatly between local authorities, with some family time workers being there to support, advise, intervene and assess (family intervention workers) whilst the role for others is to simply observe interactions.

Family time workers can feel devalued, with their role being seen as a low skilled, low paid job whereas the reality is often very different (Copson, 2023), as highlighted in the quote below:

“supervised contact staff are often extremely experienced. You know, really well trained in those Tavistock observations, they know what they're looking for and not always given the credibility that they should have...I think, it's like those memes isn't it where you have like what people think I do, and what I actually do...What people think we do is we sit in that room and we make a few notes... That's not just what we do. We do do that, but we're also...we are listening, we are really hearing, we are thinking about what we are seeing, we are intervening where we have to, we are wondering with parents very often about 'ooo...she seems like she really liked it when you did that' and then we are you know, picking up on whether they take that prompt...I think staff are actually working really hard in real subtle ways within those sessions...”

Manager of a Family Time service (Copson, 2023)

The purpose of contact

Research has found that the purpose of contact is often disputed between the parties, with parents, carers and professionals alike all having differing views on why contact is taking place and who it is for (Copson, 2023).

It is our view that in EP Placements the purpose of contact is threefold:

- To maintain children's relationships with their family. Family time should be a positive and child-centred experience.
- To assess the quality of interactions between parents and their child and provide evidence as to whether the parents can respond to and meet the needs of their child consistently
- To meet the child's needs in relation to their identity and life story should the child go on to be adopted.

It is important that all involved are aware of and in agreement with the purpose of contact and the family time agreement is a useful tool here (see appendix 2 for an example). Children's social workers need to ensure they are clear with the family time worker about what they want from them as well as expectation and what they want them to do/ not do in contact sessions.

A meeting between the professionals prior to family time commencing would be useful in order to discuss the purpose of contact and plan for the sessions. Regular contact reviews are also a useful tool that can be utilised and the family time agreement reviewed at such meetings.

Parents need to be informed of and be clear as to the purpose of the contact with their child and know that their family time sessions may form part of their assessment, with evidence submitted by the LA to Court.

The purpose of contact may change through the duration of the proceedings for example once assessments have been completed and if the care plan is adoption, then the emphasis on contact may be more about time spent 'making memories' together rather than assessment.



Preparation

A good practice guide for managing family time

Preparation prior to family time for parents and carers

It is important to talk openly about the importance and the benefits of family time right from the outset with prospective carers as it is an integral part of any EP placement. Carers need to be aware of the benefits of family time in terms of maintaining children's relationships with their family; and their role in developing relationships with parents and sharing information with them. If carers feel unable to manage family time and to develop positive working relationships with a child's parents then Early Permanence is likely not to be the route for them.

There will be some cases where it would not be appropriate for carers to provide a handover and in such cases a risk assessment should be completed in order to inform decision making. However, this is an exception in our experience.

Prospective EP carers should hear about family time at the beginning of their journey to adoption. Additional preparation should be provided in relation to the fostering task, such as giving prospective carers the opportunity to meet with experienced EP carers and hear about their experiences of managing contact.

“Those who decide they want to be FfA carers (or those approved adopters who may be approached to consider taking on an FfA placement in respect of a particular child), should attend preparation training for EP carers or receive a bespoke programme if specialist prep groups are not available. These preparation groups should offer the opportunity to meet an experienced EP carer, and include information about the role of foster carers, working with birth parents, and managing contact arrangements” (Coram).

Parents and carers report that family time can be stressful with many different emotions, which can project on to the child. People's stress responses are heightened when they do not know what to expect or understand what is happening, it is the fear of the unknown.

It's not exactly the most relaxing environment to be in, especially when it normally comes not long after you've given birth, you've got a court case on, coming up on the horizon, so you're stressed anyway, your hormones are all over the place and you know you're being reassessed at the same time, plus you also know that these people that are looking after your kid have already been preapproved to have 'em if you screw up, oh no sorry, when you screw up, oh no sorry Laura, if you screw up, 'cause they can never make their mind up if it's when or if... and then you're expected to be the best version of yourself and so then be able to show to these people that supervising you and assessing you...that while you're going through...one of the toughest moments of your life, your hormones, your head's all over the place, you're still supposed to try and show them that you're the best person for your child when at that present moment in time, you feel like your world's just been like ripped from under you.

Laura, Birth Parent (Copson 2023)

The initial family time is usually the first-time parents and carers have met and they may have already formed their own view of each other. Parents may feel judged by carers as being unable to care for their child and carers may feel anxious about how a parent will view them and also how they may manage the care of the child and juggle complex contact arrangements.

Where possible, we have found it good practice to offer the opportunity for parents and EP carers to meet, prior to family time commencing. However, we recognise that heightened emotions and tight timescales may not allow for this.

From the start, family time needs to be a positive experience for all involved and therefore it is important to have some preparation time with both parents and carers prior to family time commencing.

If possible, the supervising social worker for the carers should also attend the first contact in order to provide support, however consideration should be given to the number of people who may be involved in the session as it could feel overwhelming to the child and their parents.

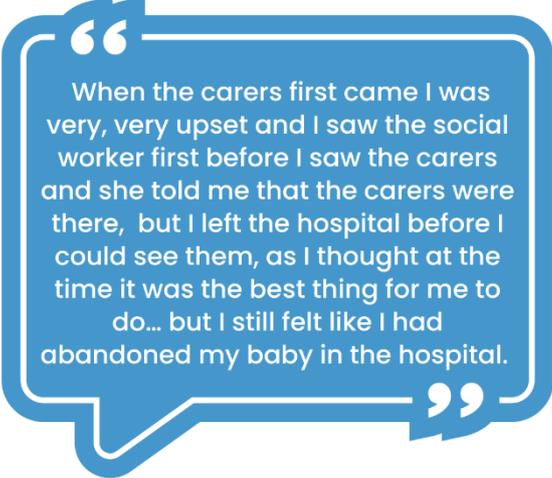
All parties will need to know the times and frequency of family time. Where the family time will be taking place, in what room and who the worker/s will be. There should be information about the expectations and communication, and about what should happen if there are any changes to be made.

This information is written into the family time agreement and all parties are to sign before family time takes place. On occasions the timing or venue may need to change at short notice, in such circumstances the family time worker should inform all parties of any changes as soon as possible and good communication is crucial.

It would be best practice to invite both parents and carers separately to attend the venue and meet the family time worker prior to the first family time session to discuss any worries or ask any questions and then to sign the agreement. However, this is not always possible.

A family time agreement is good practice in terms of setting out expectations of both the parents and the family worker (**see appendix 2**).

“The key points, adapted from Borthwick and Donnelly (2014, pp109–115), are highlighted below. The key contact arrangements will be agreed in court. A working contact agreement should then be drawn up and agreed by all parties. The agreement should set out detailed expectations and ground rules. For example, it should explain who is allowed to attend contact, the timings, the taking of photos, and situations in which contact will not take place, e.g. should the parent arrive under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It should be made clear that any workers assessing the birth parents, and the Children’s Guardian, may also attend sessions as part of their work and that the birth parents will be informed beforehand about such arrangements. The review of contact arrangements and the timescale for this must also be agreed, particularly if birth parents do not adhere to the agreement, or family members fail to notify the agency when they cannot attend “. (Borthwick and Donnelly, as cited in Dibben and Howorth, 2017).



When the carers first came I was very, very upset and I saw the social worker first before I saw the carers and she told me that the carers were there, but I left the hospital before I could see them, as I thought at the time it was the best thing for me to do... but I still felt like I had abandoned my baby in the hospital.

Birth mother - CCP

One source of stress for carers is when they set off and bring the child to family time and the child's parents do not attend. Where there are issues with parent's attendance or being late, an agreement can be put in place for parents to arrive at the venue prior to the EP carers set off with the child.

They should only set off once the family time worker has said that parents are in attendance. Based on our experience, this has worked well to minimise stress and unnecessary journeys for children.





Contact

EP adopter on the value of relationships with parents

“

We picked A up from the hospital when she was 7 days old, and we were acutely aware of the impact that A's removal from her birth mum's care had on birth Mum. I think that this cemented the approach that we subsequently took and the relationship that we built with birth Mum and Dad.

Contact with birth mum started when A was 10 days old and until a more formal schedule could be arranged, we were quite creative in enabling contact to go ahead. Whether this was for a walk in the park or at various children's centres.

We were empathetic with Mum, and tried to approach contact with an understanding of how she was feeling. We created A's contact book and we wrote it from A's perspective and always included a little 'letter' to them from A about how she was doing and what she was getting up to, as well as the normal information around nappies, food, sleep etc.

Mum liked to bring in little outfits for A to wear and I would ensure that she wore them at subsequent contact visits – almost her little wardrobe. Mum also brought in lots of toys for her and rather than them just being added to her collection at home, I kept them in a separate bag and we took them to contact, so she could play with the toys that mum had given her.

We would always have a verbal handover at the beginning and the end of contact for us both to update each other on A's care. It was a much more informal way of updating each other and helped us to build a relationship. When A was poorly at about 7 weeks, we talked collectively about her care and what needed to happen if she worsened. Mum shared that two of her children had ended up being seriously ill due to a similar condition and this was really helpful when it came to talking to the doctors at the hospital.

When it came to weaning, Mum had her views on what needed to happen, but perhaps didn't realise that guidance had changed. I printed off all of the NHS guidance for her to read and then we had a chat about how we wanted to introduce food, and how Mum could be part of that journey for example, by giving her, her breakfast when she was with her.

A's care proceedings were very lengthy which meant that we had contact with birth parents for over 12 months. Establishing a positive working relationship with them at the beginning and maintaining that through that period was very helpful as it made a tough period so much easier. I think that as we had such a strong relationship, when it came to the final hearing, mum wrote in her statement that she wanted A to remain with us if she couldn't be returned to her care, which was positive for us and for A.

Thinking ahead to A's life story and the conversations when she is older, I will always be able to say I knew her birth mum and share those experiences with her.

That is the true value of family contact in early permanence. ”

A good practice guide for managing family time



“

We were initially nervous about building a good relationship with J's mum as this was a new situation for us! We used some of the things we learned through training, such as always putting J in clothes from her mum for family time. We started writing in the contact book every day, even days when we don't have family time. Each entry is only a couple of lines but J's mum says she loves knowing what J has been up to on days when she doesn't see her.

For Mother's Day, we spent a long time choosing the right card. A lot of them seemed insensitive as they were about all the things mums do, which were things that J's mum was missing out on. Eventually, we found one that was about celebrating your first Mother's Day that was a better fit.

Baby J is about to start weaning so this week we had a meeting with mum and the family time worker to plan what J's first foods would be, and then we typed up a spreadsheet of the first two weeks of food that we can all access.

We have been lucky to be there to experience a lot of J's firsts, and J's mum really wanted to do first food, so this felt like a really good way of doing it collaboratively.

One thing that we're always careful about is making sure that when J is having her time with mum, we don't intervene or take over. So when she puts her in the car seat to come home with us, even though J might be really looking at us and trying to get our attention, we will wait until mum has gone and then respond and spend some time interacting with J before setting off, so it doesn't feel like we're cutting mum's time with her short.

What makes all of this easier is that it means we have a lovely relationship with J's mum, and so whatever happens for J, she will be able to see the contact book and hear about all our chats and collaboration and know that she was and is loved by so many people, even if it's a slightly unconventional family set up!

”

A good practice guide for managing family time

Provision of food, toys and clothes

Challenges identified by EP carers often relate to food provided during contact with parents. It is an expectation that carers will bring a change bag to contact and that bag will be packed with the food/ formula that a child may need during the contact session. If the child is on formula then the carer is expected to provide the bottles/ hot water (in a flask) and formula for the parent to make up the bottle during the session and feed their baby.

Often LA contact rooms do not have the facilities/ equipment for parents to do this themselves. If the child is weaned, then the EP carer will also be asked to provide appropriate snacks/meal as appropriate. This should all be agreed in advance. Parents may on occasions, provide snacks for the child and should provide carers with an update as to what the child has eaten at the handover at the end of the session and/ or write this in the communication book.

Food provided to children can be a source of frustration for carers as food provided may not be what they may have chosen for the child and they may need some support around this, especially where a child may be given crisps and sweets as this impacts on the meals the carer provides.

The contact change bag should be packed with a change of clothes, nappies and wipes for the parent to use during their time with the child and any other equipment such as dummies, teething rings and favourite objects to soothe the child. We suggest providing a separate changing bag to the one used on a daily basis as discussed previously.

Where parents purchase or provide clothes for their child, carers are encouraged to dress the child in the parent's outfit for contact regardless of whether the clothing would be their choice or not. If parents provide a blanket etc, this should be used by carers for contact.

Language

Language in EP placements is crucial. EP carers are foster carers initially until the child's outcome is determined via the court and they should be referred to as such in order to keep them grounded in the fostering task.

If they are referred to and refer to themselves as foster carers this reinforces their role as foster carers for both them, the child's parents and any professionals involved. This is more of a challenge for FFA carers who will be approved as prospective adopters and may need to make the shift to the role of the foster carer very quickly. In their research, Brown and Mason (2021) referred to prospective adopters needing to have a change of mindset from considering themselves as adopters to considering themselves as foster carers during the process. As foster carers, they lack control over decisions made for the child. This is something which is difficult for adopters and a reason why preparation training is crucial.

In EP placements, children are placed initially under fostering regulations and as foster carers for the child EP carers should be referred to by their first names. They are not 'mummy', 'daddy' etc in the fostering phase of the placement and will only make the transition to becoming mummy or daddy following matching panel when the child is 'placed' for adoption.

Preparation training is key, as is training for the EP carers' friends and family to also reinforce this.

Birth parents should be referred to as the child's parents and in preparation for contact, carers should be telling the child that they are 'going to see mummy/daddy'. Contact workers can facilitate this by referring to the child's family as 'mummy', 'daddy' etc or the name, which the child knows them by.

Communication

We have found that **placements work best when there is positive communication between all involved**. Parents and carers are encouraged to communicate via handovers at the beginning and end of family time. Whilst information is shared verbally, we also encourage the use of a communication book where the carer can provide daily factual information about the child.

The parents should be encouraged to write in the book at family time too to provide an account of how the child has been. If parents are reluctant to or feel unable to write then family time workers should write on behalf of the parents their account of the session. Whilst parents do not always write back they do value information shared by carers and this helps the relationships to develop between parents and carers. The book can also be kept for the child's use in later years to provide information in relation to their early life experiences and should they go onto be adopted, evidence of the collaboration between their adopter/s and birth parent/s.

Throughout the fostering phase we encourage carers to provide cards (or a small gift such as a photo of the child etc) to a child's parents on behalf of the child for significant events e.g. Mother's Day, Father's Day, parents birthday etc. See appendix 4 for suggestions

It is the expectation that parents and carers are to inform the family time worker at the earliest opportunity should they be unable to attend contact or if they are delayed in arriving (due to transport etc), which is included within the contact agreement.

Communication between professionals is equally important. There needs to be a clear flow of information between the child's social worker, the family time worker and the SSW. EP carers are not 'standard' foster carers and therefore in our experience it is helpful for the SSW to be kept updated and provided with information that can then be shared so that they can best support the carer.

This is especially valuable in circumstances where assessments are positive or contact is to be changed with different family members attending, starting to go out in the community or increased in terms of frequency and duration. Family time works best when all parties involved share clear information consistently. Regular reviews of family time are helpful in order to address any issues that might arise.

Any issues in relation to family time should also be shared by the family time worker to the child's SW/ the carer's SSW.



Considerations for Local Authorities prior to family time

The level of family time is set by the court for each individual family, however there is evidence that the quality of family time is more important than quantity or frequency.

High-frequency contact for infants (eg. four to seven times a week) can be particularly problematic and distressing, even when it is carefully supervised and supported (Kenrick, 2009; Humphreys and Kiraly, 2011; Schofield and Simmonds, 2011).

A particular concern is the disruption to infants' daily routines, making it difficult for them to experience settled caregiving. Another concern is that little support may be available for parents during contact with their children. The quality of contact is much more important to a child's welfare than frequency. 'Frequent visiting without skilled parenting support will not result in relationship building and enhance the chance of family reunification' (Humphreys and Kiraly, 2011).

Frequent contact can produce high levels of stress for infants through discontinuity of care and potentially insensitive care during contact, particularly for those who have experienced unreliable or chaotic care in the past. Such infants are likely to be hyper-vigilant or passive and the distress caused by frequent and often unsatisfactory contact can add to the difficulties impeding their recovery (Schofield and Simmonds, 2011).

Borthwick and Donnelly, (2014), highlighted considerations for contact in a concurrent planning placement. These considerations were to ensure family time was a positive experience for all and especially met the needs of the children.

There are a number of elements of family time that need organising before it starts, to ensure that this runs smoothly. Often family time happens very quickly after the child is placed with EP carers and there may be some initial sessions set that may change over time to a more consistent pattern. There are important things to consider:

Individual needs of the child: in planning for family time. Social workers need to be mindful when preparing care plans for children of their individual needs, to ensure that the family time meets the needs of the child/ren and is of good quality, rather than preparing a standardised contact plan.

Travelling time: When planning family time the child's location should be taken into account. Research suggest that very young babies (under 6 weeks) should not be travelling more than 30 minutes in a car seat without a break (Fleming, 2016). It would be best practice that these timescales are across the board for all children, regardless of age, to ensure that all children arrive at family time relaxed and calm rather than distressed and tired. We advise carers of very young infants to take a break when travelling if they are likely to be in a car seat for more than 30 mins.

Venue: This needs to be an appropriate setting for the family to meet their child and to feel as comfortable as possible. It needs to be equipped with age appropriate toys and home like equipment to ensure families have the facilities needed to feel relaxed and to meet their child's needs within this setting. Most LA's have purpose built and designated contact venues that are suitable to meet the child's needs, however on occasions contact has taken place in busy office settings. This should be avoided. The venue and the room should be consistent throughout the duration of the proceedings in order to ensure that the child and their parents feel familiar with their environment.

Ideally, the room will be equipped with everything the parent may need to ensure they can meet their child's needs making and heating up feeds, access to water for bathing etc. Handovers between parents and carers should take place inside the contact room and not in a busy foyer etc.

Family time supervisors: having a consistent worker promotes positive relationships for all parties (Thoburn, 2003). It helps families deal with the emotional experience of family time and allows the worker to deliver issue-based support whilst working with parents and families strengths (Bullen et al, 2015). Having multiple workers has shown that communication breaks down and inconsistency in advice is given. This can cause distress to the child's parents and also frustrations and challenges to the carers. Inconsistent supervisors can also negatively affect the child's experience of family time as often children may look to consistent family time supervisors with whom they have a relationship for comfort and reassurance. In the preliminary findings of her study of contact in early permanence, Copson (2023) identified that family time sessions are often supervised differently.

“We have experienced a variety of different supervision styles from workers sitting, observing and writing notes in the room and providing very little in the way of guidance and advice to workers who actively intervene and view contact as an opportunity to assist parents in developing the skills that they need in order to develop their child care skills in order to meet the needs of their child”.

The latter, in our experience is the preferred model. Contact workers should be offering parents guidance and advice, support and encouragement in order to enable the parents to develop their skills. We appreciate that on occasions, assessments of the parent's capacity may be being undertaken by another professional however, **family time is a real opportunity to effect change.**

The aim is always to ensure that family time is as pleasant and enjoyable as possible for all. Where assessments may have been completed and concluded that parents are unable to care for their child, the role of the family time supervisor could shift, with agreement, to helping parents make more memories with their child and enjoy the limited time they have left together.

Information and photographs could be gathered for the child's Life Story Book and the worker could support the parents to complete activities with the child such as hand/footprint modelling or painting, opportunities for play or a trip to the park.

Recording: the writing of thorough observations of family time is an expectation of the worker and can form an important part of the local authority's assessment. Family time observations should record how the parent greets their child, their basic care and the way in which they interact with their child.

The family should be encouraged to lead the family time, which allows the worker to observe their true abilities and assess their vulnerabilities and areas for development, so these can be addressed with the parents to enable them to make the necessary changes. The worker should participate and interact with all parties to create a friendlier and trusting environment. (Butler, G, 2015).

Consideration should be given to how it feels for parents to be observed during precious time with their child. Having someone writing down everything you do can be extremely uncomfortable and therefore note taking should be kept to a minimum by family time workers within the session, with notes being taken as subtly as possible where required.

Writing up contact sessions as soon as possible after the session itself ensures that important observations are captured in appropriate detail (often from memory, which can be lost if there is a delay in writing up). Records of contact sessions should be sent weekly to the child's social worker or uploaded as per the procedures of each Local Authority. Anything urgent should be addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Feedback: to parents should be factored into the family time session and should be at the end of every session. The reason for this is two-fold; it gives the worker the opportunity to share their observations with the parents pointing out all the positive aspects of the session, but also areas that parents need to work on. It also allows the carers to leave with the child at the end of the contact session whilst the parents remain in the venue.

This can reduce incidents of parents and carers coming into contact with each other in an unplanned and unsupervised way in a car park and protects the carers' confidentiality.

Family time workers should have an engaging and interactive role in the session to enhance child-friendly interactions and help families build on their existing skills and work towards changes in behaviour.

This family time model aims to address parent-child problems and support a secure attachment between child and family through role modelling, coaching and feedback (Thoburn, 2003)

Safeguarding: On occasions, parents may raise concern about the care of their child with the contact supervisor or make allegations of a safeguarding nature. Any concerns should be raised with the child's social worker and the carer's SSW at the earliest opportunity so that they can be addressed with the carers.

Allegations are more serious than general complaints against foster carers and should be treated differently to concerns about standards of care. Allegations must be investigated under the local child protection procedures.

The carer's SSW will also need to be informed of any allegations and their role will be to support the EP carer through any investigations. This can be a challenging time for all involved and communication between professionals is therefore crucial.

Family time in the community: Community family time is often an enjoyable experience for both the parents and the child, and is another opportunity for memory making. It is something that research has found that parents particularly enjoy and cherish (Copson, 2023).

If family time has been requested to take place within the community it should be agreed by the child's social worker in advance and knowledge of facilities available within the area is useful. A risk assessment should be completed to ensure that all concerns are addressed and all involved are aware of any potential risks.

There should be a balance of family time within the community and in the venue; the reasoning for being that family time workers will still need to observe the basic parenting offered which contributes to the assessment being undertaken by the social worker.

J's mum was really keen that J learn how to swim, so we signed her up for baby swimming lessons. J's mum asked us if we would be able to arrange for a one-off swimming session to take place during family time, and so we asked the family time worker about it and she arranged for us to go to a baby and toddler swimming near the contact centre. Swimming is J's favourite thing, so we knew it would be special for her to be able to get to do this with mum. J's mum wanted me to show her what we do at baby swimming, so I showed her and then passed J back to her so that she could do it. I started off trying to give them space but J's mum was initiating chatting and wanted to pass J to me a few times, so we ended up just all playing in the water together with the family time worker watching from the poolside and we had lots of laughs, especially Baby J! I think this will be a very special memory for both J and her mum. If J stays with us, we'd definitely be open to direct contact with J's mum in future. She has always been so open and lovely with us and I think it would be really nice for J to see that positive relationship in the future.

CCP carers on family time in the community

I had ones that like watched you like a hawk erm and just like you know, got at you the whole time. Erm, I had like you know, the likes of Carly, like Carly adored Felix and she always would have been like more than happy to take like pictures and videos and would have actually like got involved if I was ok with it and things like that there. Erm, and then like my favourite one at the end, Albert, like he was just great you know, he was trying to advocate for me to be able to take him swimming and for me actually kind of tick off a bucket list of stuff to do with him before the end and things like that there so sometimes they'll get involved a wee bit more... it just depends on who you get. Sometimes they'll act like the social worker and sometimes they'll act like just another person that's there.

Zoe, parent (Copson, 2023)

Preparation of children for family time

In most cases, children benefitting from early permanence placements are very young children, under the age of two years, however this is changing and on occasions older children are placed, often as part of a sibling group.

We are aware that in some services children over the age of 5 years have benefitted from Early Permanence placements. For example, the Goodman Project – Manchester Adoption Society, used to place children up to 6 years old in concurrent planning placements. It will be interesting to learn from colleagues in the North West who are developing EP services for children aged 4-8 years as their expertise in supporting family time for older children grows.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to prepare them for family time. If they are of sufficient age and understanding it may be useful for the LA to share their Children's guide with them.

It is good practice to factor in some preparation for the child/ren in relation to the format of family time, so that they know what to expect and what is expected of them; if a visit to the venue prior to family time starting could be arranged and meeting the family time worker, then this would help the child feel more relaxed and comfortable when attending their first family time session with their parents.

In most cases it will be the EP carer who is preparing the child for family time and supporting them afterwards. Again, preparation and support for carers is key to equip them with the skills and training to enable them to support the child appropriately.

In most cases for very young children, contact will form part of their routine and the carer will be informing them they are going to see "mummy/ daddy". For older children this can be more challenging and poorly managed family time can contribute to the trauma children experience. Carers will need support to manage children's behaviours following contact – they will need emotional support and advice from their SSW and may benefit from a therapeutic consultation and therapeutic parenting course.

For carers considering a placement for older children (4+) therapeutic parenting training should be considered as part of their preparation.





Contact

CCP carers talk contact

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Contact was probably one of the most difficult parts of this process. Due to A's age (4 at the time of placement) he understood-to a degree-what was going on. His behaviour became noticeably different before and after sessions. He clearly displayed signs of anxiety before the sessions as he would often start asking the same questions the closer we got to the centre. His behaviour could become quite explosive at times - more so in the earlier stages of the placement.

Using the therapeutic techniques made a big difference and letting him 'get out' his feelings, either anger by punching things / throwing things or sadness by cuddling him and repeating the message that he's safe here. It was difficult as sometimes this could then mean we were rushing and I was always very anxious to not be late as the session was only for an hour.

With time however, reminding myself that we will get there when we get there helped as sometimes A needed more time and it was vital not to rush if he was having a particularly difficult time. Very early on we could see a change in his behaviour sometimes the night before. Quickly learning that the time around contact was going to be difficult helped to manage our expectations.

We would make sure there was as much calm time before and after as possible. Following the sessions, A could become physical and on a couple of occasions, I had to stop driving and pull over. Again, remaining calm, and ensuring he got the message that we won't be going anywhere until I know we're safe as it's my job to keep us all safe, and just taking the time necessary for the situation to deescalate, seemed to be the key.

Keeping things as much the same as possible and instilling a routine would help. For example, A knew snacks were always packed for him in his bag and that I always had some for the journey home so this often made him excited to find out what snack I had when returning from the session.

Playing car games on the way there helped the time pass and was often a time when A shared his worries- through role playing- but at times gave me insight into past trauma he'd experienced. For a time, they clearly triggered him as he had night terrors following the sessions and repeated bad language heard either during the session, or from when he was smaller.

Contact did become more difficult when parents discovered A's school and this did greatly change the relationship as we were no longer able to do handovers. There was a short period where it was thought parents knew our house and that was incredibly stressful. Thankfully this was not the case. They do/did know what car we drive which is partly because A could easily say the car, but also because the location of the centre meant that I would drive past the place and a couple of times they were outside and will have seen me drive past. ”

continued overleaf...

[A good practice guide for managing family time](#)



“

We also had to alert the centre staff that A had started to use our surname, which is a pretty unusual surname and difficult for a 4/5 year old to say. Details like this are more problematic with the older a child is and relies on centre staff to be vigilant during the sessions, which they were.

Overall, it did become easier before and after the sessions as A settled into his placement with us. The sessions became very infrequent about 6 months in and in some ways this helped as it meant A had longer periods of calm and not feeling unsettled.

With specific behaviours such as spitting and swearing, we consulted the A-Z of Therapeutic parenting book and also got advice from and [our agency] both things greatly helped.

Being able to share details about a placement is probably the most difficult thing with the older a child gets. It was trickier for us as it was wrongly shared in court the area the children were being placed in before they came to us. ”

Preparing children already in the family for family time

EP carers may already have children in their family whether they be birth children, adopted, or fostered children. They will need to prepare those children for the child placed having contact and spending time with their family.

We suggest that children already in the family are spoken to about looking after a child for a period of time and during this time, the adult carer will take them for family time with their mummy and daddy.

Again, language is key in the preparation of children; there should be no reference to adoption or the child placed being their brother or sister until the point that they are matched for adoption. There are varieties of tools that can be used to prepare children within a family for the fostering role that can be tailored to children's specific needs.

Good Practice suggests that children should not be brought to/ from contact with the child in placement; and instead they are cared for elsewhere (school, nursery or a relative) whilst their parent facilitates family time. The carer will need to consider how their support network can assist with any children they are already caring for, especially in school holidays.

For children who have been adopted by the EP carers, the placement of a child may trigger feelings of uncertainty for them about their future and may raise questions about their own birth family and history. EP carers should be able to seek support and advice from their SSW/ approving agency in relation to how best to support their child.

Bringing the child to family time

How the child is brought into family time can be instrumental in developing relationships and contact workers and carers should be mindful of the parent's feelings. For very young children who are not yet mobile, ideally, they should be brought to the venue in the car seat, with the carer placing the seat in front of the parents, enabling them to greet their child and remove them from the seat whilst the carer is providing a handover. At the end of contact, the parent should be encouraged to place the child back into the car seat for when the carer comes to collect them. This may help to avoid parents feeling they are physically handing over their child in an intimate way into the arms of the carer. If the child is upset at the end of contact, again the parents or carer can soothe and comfort them in the car seat without parents feeling that they have had to hand their child over the carer to comfort.

Whilst they may use them at other times, carers should avoid bringing children in to contact using baby carriers/slings as this be emotive for parents and serve as a reminder of the physical closeness and care their child receives from their carer.

For toddlers, the same principle could apply with the use of a pushchair.

For older children who are mobile and able to walk into the contact room, hand holding between the carer and child should be avoided on entering the room. Carers should be encouraged to greet the parent warmly, signalling to the child that they trust the parent and giving the child unspoken permission to approach their parent

Handover

EP carers are not traditional foster carers and as such, there should be no expectation that they will supervise or have unsupervised contact with a child's parents. Ultimately, they could go on to adopt the child and so whilst there are significant benefits in developing relationships between the adults, we still need to be mindful of carer/ placement confidentiality.

We know from research undertaken by Lancaster University (2021) that CCP carers expect to manage more uncertainty than FfA carers and are prepared to deal with such uncertainties. CCP carers also expect to facilitate family time between a child and their parents and through additional training and preparation, they can see the benefits of this for the child. FfA carers may historically be less well prepared for this although the training and preparation of EP carers is improving nationally.

In our experience, EP carers benefit from additional training and preparation about family time and what is expected of them in a handover. Handovers should be brief and well supported by the contact worker, who in the early stages of the placement may need to encourage conversations to flow.

Whilst the main focus of a handover should be sharing information about the child such as when they last ate, how they slept, when their next feed may be due, updates on health etc. this may also be an opportunity for parents and carers to have brief informal conversations with each other which can lead to mutual respect and trust.

Handover may also be a nice opportunity for EP carers to share any activities the child has undertaken, e.g a trip to the park (whilst being mindful of confidentiality and not disclosing location) or to seek parental views and permissions about activities such as swimming etc. Research has shown that parents feel more positive about their child's carers and respected by them when carers took an active interest in their lives and asked how they were (Copson, 2023).

Anything important that parents need to know about their child should be shared verbally; whilst EP carers are encouraged to write updates in a communication book, they should not assume parents will read this. Contact workers may need to encourage parents to write in the communication book if they wish, or may offer to write something on their behalf, dictating what they wish to say, if the parents aren't confident in doing so.

The child's parents should be encouraged to handover brief information at the end of the contact session to the carer and they will need to be supported and encouraged to do this, particularly in the early stages when relationships are being established. Where a parent initially does not feel able to speak directly to their EP carer the contact worker should agree with the parent what is shared on their behalf. Hopefully and in time, parents and carers will be able to engage in and have a more natural interaction at the beginning and end of the session.



“The Local Authority run contact sessions were really chaotic and unsafe initially. We ended up having to step in and guided them on how handover should work. It did improve after that.”

EP carer on contact

Sibling contact

'Sibling relationships are likely to last a lifetime and can be an integral part of a child's sense of identity, while potentially also providing support, companionship, continuity, annoyance, competition and conflict.' (Edwards et al 2005). With 80% of the population having siblings (Fostering Network), it is likely that EP carers in their role as foster carers will need to consider and facilitate relationships between a child and their brothers and sisters and maintaining family time with siblings should be a priority within the planning of family time. This requires active involvement by all parties to ensure this is planned to meet the needs of the children and there may well be tricky logistics involved with large siblings groups in multiple placements.

The contact between siblings can be a combination of face to face family time but also face time or Zoom/Teams, this will ensure that siblings are communicating with each other on a regular basis and this helps to maintain their identity.

Sibling contact can add some additional complexities for EP placements but needs to be thought about and considered in the contact plan. It may be that siblings can join parents' contacts or have their own contact with their brother/ sister but again issues in relation to confidentiality should be considered.

“

Family Time was booked three times per week from the week we got R home from ICU. The sessions started mid December 2021. Birth dad came to two sessions only then stopped coming. He never saw R again. Birth mum attended four sessions with her two other children then stopped coming. She never saw R again from that stage. All contact was paused while the SW worked with the birth family to try to encourage them to start the contact meetings again.

In February, we started doing once-a-week contact with the siblings only. Every Wednesday we met them outside the children's centre and they spent one hour with R under the supervision of the contact centre worker. We got to chat to his brother and sister briefly each week and got to know them a little bit and were able to ask questions about school and their future plans etc. We always enjoyed the short interactions very much and were glad they loved getting to know R. We felt a lot of empathy towards them and offered if we might be able to be some kind of mentors for them moving forwards but the idea was rejected. We understood the rationale as to why.

On the final day of contact in early May it was a very emotional day for everyone and we knew that they would find it very good seeing R for the last time. We gave them some keepsakes in a memory box so they would have things of his. It was very hard driving away that day. ”

CCP carer on contact with siblings



Virtual contact

Due to restrictions in relation to Covid-19 many contacts ceased, at least for some time and contacts moved to a virtual in a variety of guises including WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Should we ever need to return to a virtual contact then it is important that carers feel comfortable and confident to conduct contact in such a way. All local authorities manage virtual contacts differently but some advice for carers include:

- Set up a new identifiable email address that can be used just for contact. Some carers have used the children's forenames within the email.
- It might be useful to buy a pay as you go sim card used just for contact and sharing photos etc. via WhatsApp.
- Be mindful of how you are logging onto Zoom, if you are able to change your name as you log in – it may be helpful to use the child's first name.
- Be mindful of confidentiality and choose a room that is quiet and does not show personal belongings. Maybe this could be the child's bedroom. It may be helpful to use this room for each virtual contact so you feel like your confidentiality is protected
- Some carers have found it useful to sit off camera after they have provided a brief handover to the birth parent. The parent wants to see their child and by being off camera, you can help to keep them focussed on the screen.
- Do not feel bad if the child cries or needs some personal care tasks undertaking during contact. You need to attend to their needs and the supervisor may cut contact short if the child becomes distressed.
- If sending picture or video through WhatsApp, ensure these are not showing any personal belongings and things that could identify your locality.

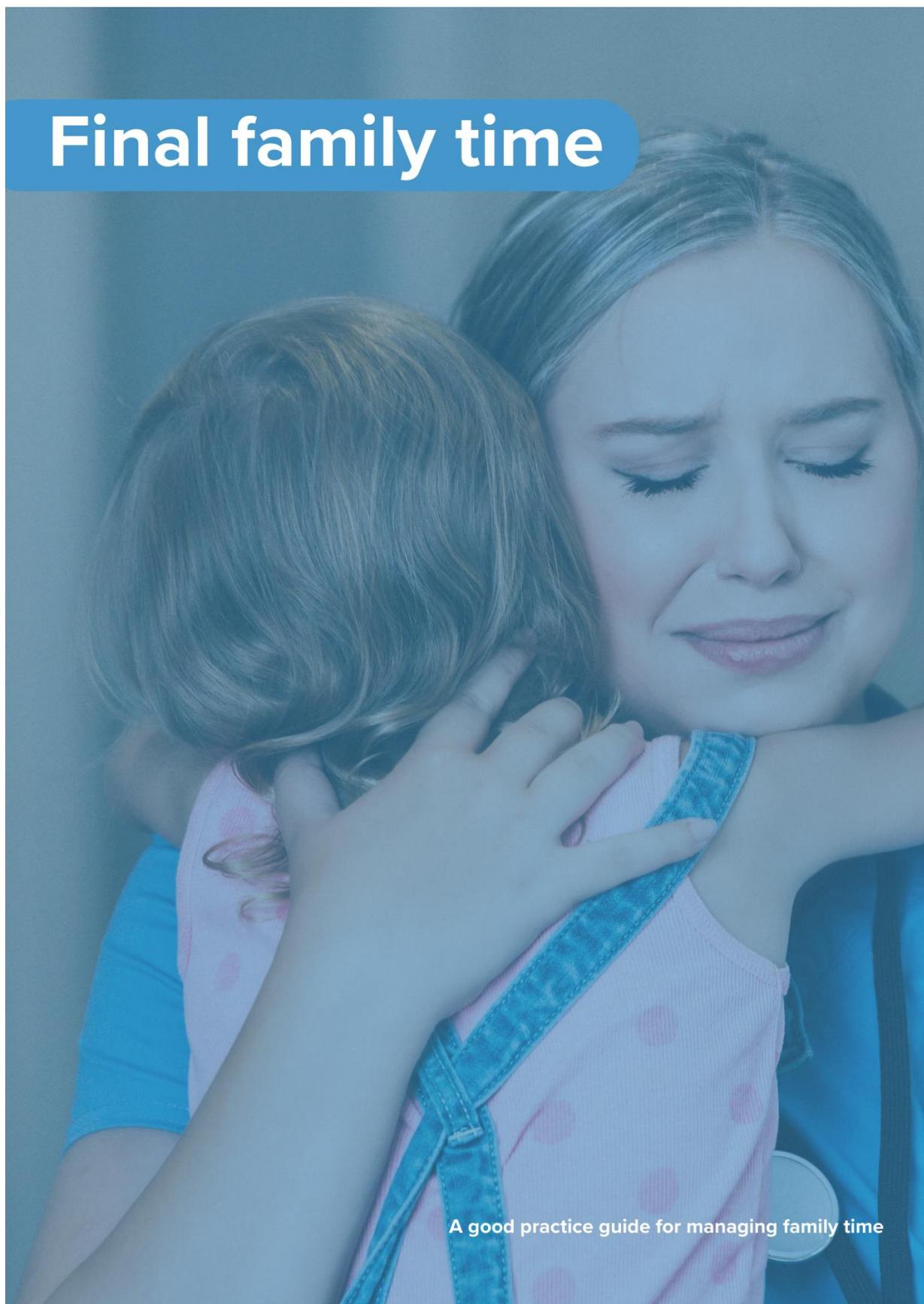
Think about whether the photos & videos you send are appropriate, e.g. if sending pictures of the child in the bath, ensure it does not show the genital area. Although parents are asked not to post pictures on social media, once we have passed them on there are no guarantees that they will not.

- If you are asked to resume face-to-face contact, please ask to see and ensure you follow the risk assessment of the local authority.

Workers will need to ensure that there is a discussion and agreement about who will forward onto parents any photos requested and who will be responsible for the management and supervision of any virtual family time.

Further information and resources on managing virtual contact can be found on the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory's website [Contact during lockdown: How are children and their birth families keeping in touch? - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory \(nuffieldfjo.org.uk\)](https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk), drawing on research undertaken during the COVID-19 lockdown period (Neil et. al, 2020).

Final family time



Managing a final family time

'[the goodbye contact] was terrible...I almost want to put in...an official complaint because I think it was so badly managed... it was half term, unfortunate, usual contact worker was on leave, lots of contact workers were on leave, lots of Family Time needs to happen. Yes, but this is a final contact...so the contact worker called me ten minutes late I think it was to say contact's happening and can you get here five minutes early because I need to leave five minutes early and I said no, firstly we live 45 minutes away so even if we leave now we're not gonna get there five minutes early, we'll get there right on time and what, like, I was just a bit flabbergasted, you can't take away five minutes from final contact, that's not ok. And yeah, it was really rushed...I thought it was unprofessional the way it was dealt with and just uncaring to both his Dad and to us and to Fred, I just thought it was horrendous really and like yes, in some ways it was probably good because it meant that C [Dad] just had to kind of go, but also it was rushed and I didn't feel that was fair for his final contact...I know you've got to get on to your next contact but I'm assuming that's probably not a final contact... come on, have a bit of humanity here....so the contact worker was flapping 'cause she couldn't find her keys, Dad had gone, I was there crying with like feeling quite sad...'

Lynsey, EP Carer (Copson, 2023)

Additional planning will need to take place for the management of goodbye contacts / the final family time. Some tips include:

Consistent worker

To avoid issues as highlighted in the quote above, it is important that the worker who supports the goodbye/ final contact is familiar to the parents, carers and the child. Where possible the final family time should not be arranged at a time when the key worker is on leave.

Venue

Often families will ask for their final family time to take place in different place and often this is a public place. It is good practice to facilitate this time within the normal venue that is familiar to the parents but also the child/ren. Parent may persist in this request however, the well-being of everyone is a priority as this time will be an emotional time for the family and you as the worker needs to be supportive in a venue which is familiar, with other professionals around to assist if necessary.

Preparing the parents/family

There needs to be discussions with the people who are going to be part of the final family time. It is important to check out with them how they are feeling and parents should be empowered and have some say in how this final session is managed. Whilst it is good practice that parents usually stay in the room at the end of contact and allow the carer and child to leave first on this occasion they should be given an option to leave before their child if they so wish. Seeing their child leave with their EP carer for the final time can be incredibly emotive. A risk assessment will need to be undertaken.

Family time session

The family time session should be planned and managed by the family time worker but have another professional around to assist. The length of the session needs to be the same or shorter due to the emotions that the family will be feeling. On occasion, the session may need to be cut short if the parent or child is distressed and EP carers may need to be called back.

Ending

The ending of the session should have been planned prior to the session so that everyone is aware of how the session will end. It is the family time worker who should take responsibility to alert and manage the ending of the session, which needs to be managed promptly. Another professional should be available to assist so that the ending goes according to plan and support is given to all involved.



Maintaining Relationships after the adoption order

Early Permanence carers, by the very nature of the relationship they have developed with a child's parents throughout the fostering phase of the placement should be in a good position to offer ongoing direct contact post adoption.

However, this is very often not the case and in our experience is often not supported by Local Authorities for very young children. Conversely, when it does take place it can have great benefits for a child. Here, a CCP carer explains the benefits of contact post adoption for their son:

“Why did you feel able to offer direct post adoption contact?”

We agreed with the reasons that N couldn't live with his birth family but we didn't think there was a risk to him seeing them. I remember sitting with his court guardian and saying that when he is 13 he would ask me why he wasn't able to see his dad and I didn't feel I had a good enough reason to tell him. The court guardian agreed and spoke to his birth family. Although they contested the adoption initially, by the end that could see he was happy with us and actually agreed that he should be adopted by us.

What are the benefits for your child?

We have now been doing direct contact for 6 years. The first couple of times N was unsettled afterwards but these days he isn't. The main benefit is knowing who his dad is. They get on well when they see each other and there are actually quite a lot of similarities between them and their mannerisms! They can both talk the hind leg off a donkey and when we most recently met for a walk the both suddenly spontaneously climbed the same tree! Also we know lots about that side of his birth family and can answer questions he has between meetings. In fact the hardest thing for N is the contrast in that we know so much less about his birth mother and he doesn't understand why, in his words "She doesn't want to meet me."

How did the direct contact increase overtime?

We started with letter box plus one supervised visit a year. This has slowly changed and grown. We now send direct emails and pictures (we have an email address set up just for this). This is lovely for things like sending off a quick picture when his first tooth fell out.

Also every couple of months or so his dad or nan will send a quick email asking how he is. I think this is probably a lot more reassuring for them than waiting for a letter and the delays that can happen there.

We now see them in person twice a year. We found that once a year meant that he had changed so much and also he didn't remember his dad as well. Twice a year keeps it a bit fresher in their minds.

We no longer have someone supervise but [CCP contact worker] does speak to his dad on the phone before visits. That really helps with expectations and also getting any messages between us. It really helps that she is the same contact worker that supervised the sessions 7 years ago as the relationships are really important to make it work. All sides are really committed to making it work which has been the key.

What is your child's understanding of the direct contact?

We have never called it contact with N. He just knows we are "seeing his dad". He used to struggle with things like wanting his dad to come to his birthday parties but at the moment he is happy with meeting his dad a couple of times a year. One thing I was concerned with was if

his dad brought him present he would become focused on that but he hasn't and his dad just gives him something small at the end of the session. Most recently it was a Lego car which N then enjoyed taking photos of to send to his dad.

What are the challenges around direct contact?

For us at the moment there are very few challenges. It feels a lot more natural than writing a letter and sending it to someone you don't know or don't see. For instance, N has been diagnosed with ADHD in the last year. This was a very natural conversation but I'm not sure I would have felt comfortable writing it in a letter. I think the main challenge at the moment is thinking of where to meet and what to do as N gets older. N is less interested in going to the park now. Also when there is some information we don't want shared with or in front of N this has needed to be made clear to his birth family before we meet.

Advice you could share with others who may be considering direct contact

Only do it if you are confident it is safe for your family. It was absolutely the right choice for ours. I am glad we fought for it and I've never regretted it but I also know it wouldn't work for every family”.

Contact with Dad has been positive so far, in that it could be deemed successful. The affection he has for A is clear, and equally I believe he appreciates that we have made allowances for him to continue to see A despite some further disruption to his personal life that we believe is now at an end.

Our visits have been in open / public environments such as garden centres or parks, with Dad and us have lengthy conversations and discussions whilst updating him on A's progress. The opportunity for dad to do simple things like hold A's hand whilst walking, push her on the swings and splash in puddles with her give him a huge opportunity to spend some short time with A. Currently, I do not see a benefit for A, in the sense that dad is another person we go and see, who pushes her on swings and buys her a hot chocolate etc. As time goes on and she begins to understand more and get older, she will understand the significance of these visits.

CCP Carer on contact post adoption

Summary



Key points

to consider when facilitating family time in EP placements

01



Positive & enjoyable

Family time should be a positive and enjoyable experience for all. Family time support and supervision should be of good quality, where expectations are clearly set out with the use of a family time agreement.

02



Role of the family time worker pivotal

The role of the family time worker is a skilled and responsible position and the role of the skilled family time worker is to support contact and 'scaffold' the relationship between parents and carers

03



Purpose of family time

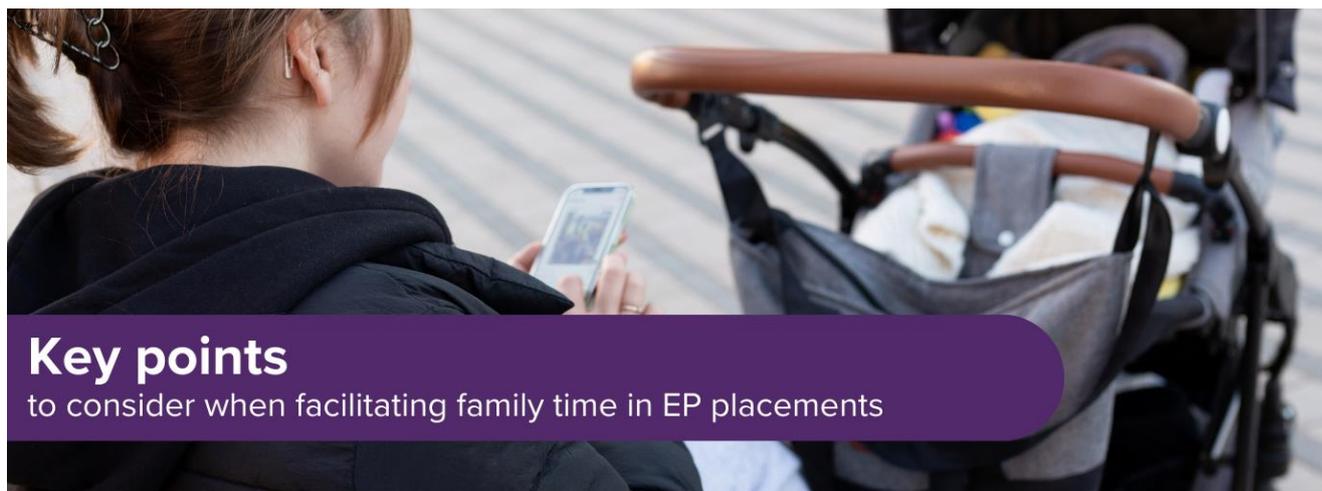
The purpose of family time needs to be clearly defined and agreed prior to family time commencing.

04



Support for birth parents

Children's parents need support and encouragement to help them understand what Children's Services and the Courts require of them during contact/ family time and support to build a positive relationship with their child's carers.



Key points

to consider when facilitating family time in EP placements

05



Early Permanence carers role

Early Permanence carers should be expected to take children to and from contact and facilitate handovers, and will require additional preparation and higher levels of emotional support to enable them to do so. EP carers need to be suitably prepared to manage contact arrangements for the child/children in their care and have empathy for the child's parents.

06



Early Permanence carers are adopters

Early Permanence carers are not mainstream or traditional foster carers. They have entered this process in the main because they want to adopt and they need to be treated empathetically with additional consideration of this fact. They have additional challenges and uncertainties to negotiate that are inherent in EP placements, which needs to be kept in mind when supporting and working with these carers.

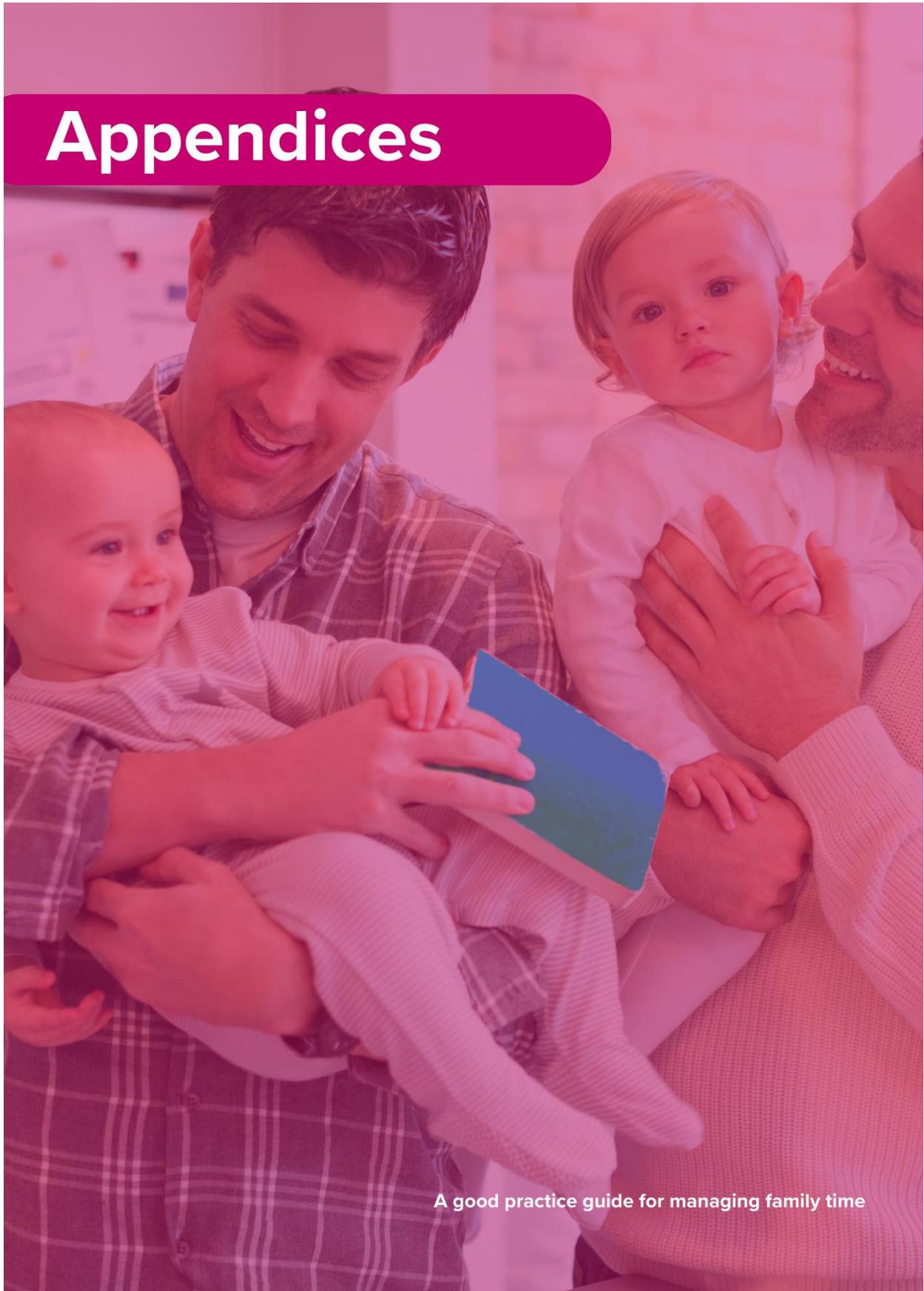
Remember the three C's - consistency, confidentiality and communication

- **Consistency** - is key. Family time should be facilitated in a warm and nurturing environment with the same worker/s, at the same venue and at a regular time-slot and the quality of the support is consistent for each child, their parent/s and EP carer. Having 1 or 2 consistent workers for family time is very important. This benefits parents, children & carers as they can build up a trusting relationship and are given consistent messages. This also benefits the professionals as the family time worker will know the family very well and can inform on positives but also on things they need to work towards.
- **Confidentiality** - the need for this in EP is very important as potentially this could become an adoptive placement. Family time workers need to ensure that information regarding the carers is kept confidential.
- **Communication** – There needs to be clear and consistent communication between the child's social worker, contact worker and the SSW for the EP carers. Communication between parents and carers should also be encouraged, face to face at handovers and via the communication book.

Remember, where carers and birth relatives can relate to each other constructively, working together in the best interests of the child, contact is much more likely to be comfortable for the child (Neil 2010). Family time that is well managed, consistent, supportive and well supported can be fundamental in establishing positive working relationships between a child's parents and carers, which can only benefit the child, whatever the outcome.

A good practice guide for managing family time

Appendices



A good practice guide for managing family time

Appendix 1 – Information for parents about Early Permanence

Dear Parent

If you are reading this, it will probably mean that there are plans for court proceedings where decisions will be made about your child's future. We hope that this information will be helpful during what is usually a very difficult time for you as a parent and the wider family.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information about the care of your child and about early permanence.

What is Early Permanence?

Early Permanence is an umbrella term covering both concurrent planning and fostering for adoption placements, terms which you may have heard before. The aim of Early Permanence is to provide your child with a consistent and stable placement with carers who have been specially training to look after children as both foster carers and adopters.

We hope that the outcome of the court proceedings will be that your child can be returned to your care or to someone within their wider family. Early permanence carers are committed to helping us reunite children with their families if possible. However, if the Court decides that your child cannot return home to you or to another member of your family, these carers are ready to offer the security of adoption so that your child does not face another change of carer. The benefits for the children is security and consistency of carer.

The aims of an Early Permanence Placement are:

- To provide the best possible care to young children whilst they are away from their parents.
- To reduce the number of carers a child may live with until decisions by the court are made.
- To provide love and security to children when it is not possible for them to return to their parents, or to live with other family members.

What happens during an Early Permanence placement?

The Court will be responsible for making the decision about where your child should

live in the future. It is the local authority's job to work with you to assess whether or not your child can return to your care and to support you if this happens, but it is still the Court's decision.

During this time we will provide a foster placement for your child and will also ensure that you have regular, good quality family time with your child. The frequency and length of this will be decided by the Court. We will have a written agreement with you setting out the family time arrangements, what you are expected to do and what help is available for you.

The family time will take place in an agreed venue with a **family time supervisor** who will support you and your child, help you to get the most out of your family time and develop your parenting skills as part of ongoing assessment

You will also have the opportunity to meet the person who is caring for your child to discuss what is happening in your child's life and how she or he is developing. In most cases your

child's carer will bring your child to and from family time and will give you an update as to how they have been since you last saw them.

What could happen to my child in the longer term?

The Court will decide whether your child can return to you or another member of your family. The decision will be based on the evidence from you, as well as evidence from social workers, the Children's Guardian and any other professionals who have been asked to do an assessment or give an opinion. If the Court's decision is that your child can return to you a plan will be agreed to make this happen. The local authority will support you with this reunification.

If the Court decides that your child cannot return to you or a member of your extended family, your child will continue to be cared for by the Early Permanence carers who would begin the formal adoptive matching process. They would then apply to the court to become the adoptive parents, and you would be notified at this time. The Early Permanence carers would already have got to know you and your child and your child/children will not have to have another move and they can continue to grow in a place which is familiar to them. You would also already know the carers and we hope you would feel confident that they would give your child the love and security he or she needs.

Who can I discuss these arrangements with?

Your child's social worker will be able to explain the information in this letter in more detail. You may also find it helpful to discuss this letter with your solicitor.

For further information / support:

This will understandably be a difficult and stressful time for you so please do ask for support. You can get help or advice from:

- Your child's social worker
- Your child's court appointed Guardian (If court proceedings have begun)
- Your solicitor or legal representative
- Family Rights Group 0808 801 0366
- The Local Authority in which you live will be able to direct you to local independent support for families where adoption is being discussed, or in the event that adoption takes place.
- Samaritans 116 123

Appendix 2 - Example of a family time agreement.

This agreement can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual family involved and their particular areas for development. We use family time agreements to set out clear expectations of all involved. They are not legally binding but can be shared with the child's social worker and those party to the proceedings if appropriate.

FAMILY TIME AGREEMENT BETWEEN [PARENTS] AND [LOCAL AUTHORITY]

Team Address			
Telephone Number			
Child's Name			
Agreement Date		Venue	
Team			
Social Worker			
Parent:			DOB:
			Telephone:
			Address:
Parent:			DOB
			Telephone:
			Address:
Family Time worker:			
Other:			

Why has supervised family time been requested? (Legal status/ care plans/ purpose)	
Level Of Supervision:	
100%	<input type="checkbox"/>
High: staff can have comfort break	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loose:	<input type="checkbox"/>
A family time session may be terminated:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If parent(s) display aggressive and volatile behaviour, physically or verbally. • If parent(s) appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs <p>In all cases where contact has to be cancelled due to a safeguarding concern the Local Authority will review the family time before it recommences.</p>	
Are supervised outings in the community permissible? Please specify details:	
Culture, religion and heritage :	
Does the child have specific needs which need to be considered during family time?:	
Who will be present during contact(i.e. siblings, family members)	
Note: within your contact session you may have other professionals coming to observe your contact. E.g. social worker, Guardian	

Family Time Arrangements:

Your family time supervisor will be:

Days and Times:

Family time will start:

Location:

Family time will take place at:

Handover

At the beginning of family time the carer/s will explain how your child has been and this gives you an opportunity to ask any questions about your child i.e. feeding, sleeping pattern.

At the end of family time the carer/s will come into family time and you will be able to tell them how your child has been within the session and give them information about feeding etc.

The carer/s will leave first and this is when the family time supervisor will give you feedback about your contact session.

Communication:

A communication book will be provided by the carer(s) detailing basic information on your child's care day and night, for example, how well he or she fed or slept.

Mobile phone:

Mobile phones may not be used during contact and only answered if the call is important i.e. solicitor

Support during contact:

Support is offered to parents throughout contact, however if parent(s) require additional support the supervisor will refer them to the social worker

Additional Information:**Photographs:**

Photographs of your child (only) can be taken with a camera or mobile phone by parents if the Local Authority agrees to this.

Photographs must not be shared on Facebook or any other social network. If there is evidence that this has happened we will not allow you to bring your mobile phone or camera into contact.

Family time workers will also take photographs within the contacts sessions for the purpose of Life story book, parents will get copies of all photographs at the end of the placement.

I give my consent for family time workers to take photographs within the family time session for the purpose of Life Story work and agree for them to be kept on the system for future use for the child.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

LA agree/not agree for photos to be taken by parents in contact

What will happen if the parents do not arrive for contact and do not call the Supervised Contact Team to say they will be late:

On the day of contact parent(s) need to arrive at the contact venue ½ hour before the start of family time; if parent(s) haven't arrived at the agreed time then contact will be cancelled and not replaced. Clearly it would be unfair on your child to wait indefinitely, which could cause unnecessary anxiety and stress to them.

If parents phone in to say that they are delayed, prior to the time they are due to arrive they will be given 15 minutes extra time from when they are due to arrive. Contact is not extended to compensate for a late arrival by parent(s). If this happens on a regular basis this will be reviewed and other arrangements will be put into place.

If parents have failed to attend three family time sessions without giving prior notice contact will be suspended and the Local Authority Social Worker will be informed.

The Family Time Service telephone number is :

Your family time supervisor is _____ mobile _____

Who is responsible for essential items (e.g. bottles, nappies):

Carers will provide all essential items in an appropriate bag, e.g. bottles, nappies etc.

Parent(s) can contribute and bring clothes, nappies etc. as long as they are appropriate for the child's age and size.

Expectations of Parent(s):**We expect you to:**

1. Keep to the plans made in this agreement; this includes beginning and ending of the family time session
2. Not be verbally or physically aggressive
3. Notify the family time team if you are delayed or unable to attend contact as soon as possible and no later than within 15 minutes of the start time.
4. Ensure only those people specified in this agreement may attend the family time session

5. Appreciate that the family time supervisor has no responsibility for social work or legal decision making, but will share their observations with other professionals
6. Ensure any new phone numbers are passed to the family time Supervisor or the Social Worker as soon as possible.

Expectations of the Family Time Team:**What you can expect from us:**

1. We will work with you to ensure your time with your child is a happy experience.
2. We will ensure that we keep to the days, times and venues agreed.
3. Should your child be unwell and the contact session needs to be cancelled, we will contact you as soon as possible.
4. Should your family time supervisor be unable to undertake the contact we will let you know as soon as possible and will try to find another supervisor.
5. We will try to ensure you have the same room for each session.
6. The Family Time Team are available should you wish to discuss your views and comments about the service we are providing.
7. We will give you verbal feedback at the end of each session about how the contact has gone and any changes that need to be made.
8. We will make written recordings following each contact session that will be sent to the referring social worker. These will be used in reports to the Court.
9. Observation reports will be shared with the parents via court proceedings.
10. The Family Time Team agrees to work in partnership, in an honest and open manner, sharing concerns and positive feedback.

Concerns ,comments & complaints:

Individuals, families and carers have a right to raise concerns about the service. If you are unhappy with the service please speak to your family time supervisor in the first instance.

If you are still not happy then please ask to speak to the manager who is [] Telephone Number:

If you consider that the issues you have raised have not been dealt with satisfactorily you have the right to use the complaints procedure.

You can make a complaint by writing to: .

We welcome feedback on our service and rely on this to make improvements. At a later date we will be asking you to provide feedback on the service and hope you will agree to do this.

	Agreement signed by	Date
Parent:		
Parent:		
Family time worker:		

Appendix 3 – Family time observation sheet

FAMILY TIME OBSERVATION SHEET

Name of child:

Date of family time:

Venue:

Who Attended:

Time of session:

Arrival time:

Presentation of parents:

Handover:

Greeting:

Interaction between Parent/child:

Guidance & Boundaries/Health & Safety:

Basic care:

Ending:

Feedback:

Parents Comments:

Any issues/concerns raised by Parents

YES

NO

If yes what were the issues/concerns?

Have there been any difficulties/ challenges during family time?

YES

NO

If yes, please give details

Did the worker have to intervene?

YES

NO

If yes why did the worker have to intervene and how was this resolved?

Summary of family time session:

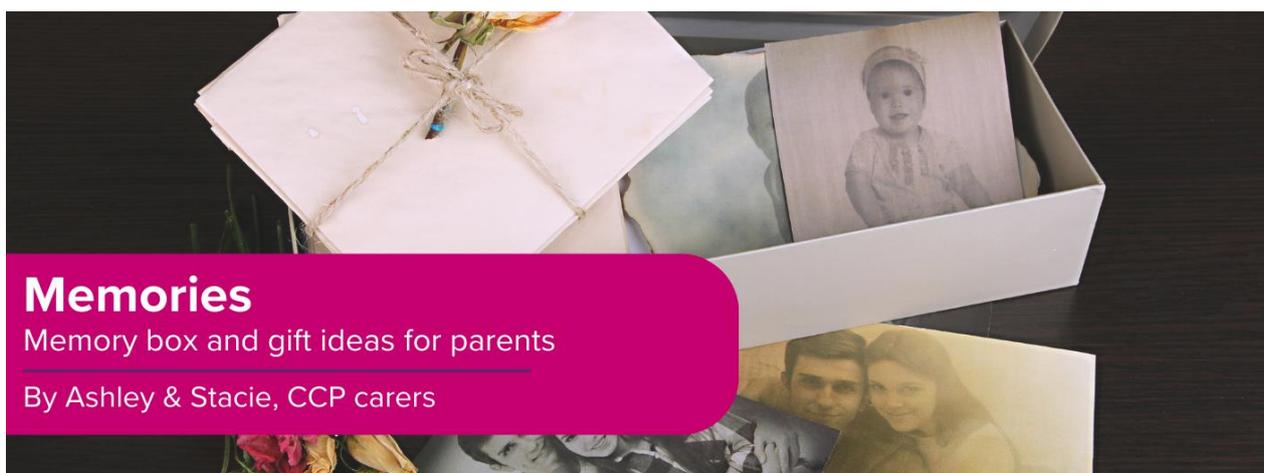
Additional information:

Signature:

Role:

Date:

Appendix 4 – Memory box and gift ideas for parents



Memories

Memory box and gift ideas for parents

By Ashley & Stacie, CCP carers

What's in a memory?

When we thought about what we were going to put in a Memory Box for birth parents we also thought what we would put in our own Memory Box: they should be the same, or as close as possible. Both boxes mirrored each other as much as they could, as we didn't know which one the baby would grow up with. We chose wooden boxes at a very reasonable price and a decent size. These can be painted to taste, and we had the lids embossed with Baby's name and extra Mummy & Daddy for parents box.

Nappies

We put in a nappy in the first size Baby wore, and one from each size up until contact ended. It shows just how small Baby was and how far they had come in the time that Baby was with us and Birth Parents together.

Dummies

Birth Parents provided a twin pack of dummies in hospital that Baby came home to us with. We bought our first dummies once we knew the brand and shape Baby was using. Each memory box contains one of Mum and Dad's dummies and one from us.

Photographs

We took a photograph each week of everyday life 'firsts' for Baby that Birth Parents would miss out on during the fostering stage. Such as: first bath time (modest of course); first walk in the park; sat in a Baby's first chair; first Moses basket/cot picture. Each photo is focused on Baby alone, and the geographical location cannot be identified. Some of these we gave to Mum and Dad during contact, so they had them early. Each box has 20 identical pictures with caption labels on the back.



Hospital items

The hospital was kind enough to give two sets of tags and two blankets for baby being released. We equally shared these between both boxes. We took Birth Parents blanket to our first contact for them to have right away, it was a lovely way to help break the ice. We gave Mum and Dad the umbilical clip in their box as they requested it, in a mini gift box we made.

First outfits

Mum and Dad provided some of Baby's first outfits. All that said "Mummy" or "Daddy" on them all went in the Parent's box, along with some of Birth Parents favourites. We put in our box some of the baby grows and an outfit from Mum and Dad (asked Birth Parents) and some of the first outfits we bought.

Contact Book

A copy of the joint contact book was agreed to be provided for one of the boxes and the original would be placed in the box the remained with Baby.

Art work

Any crafting or art work would come in twos, one for each Memory box.

A good practice guide for managing family time



There are many items that can provide a thousand Memories. We kept a bit of room in each box as well for personal memories. Mum and Dad have space to add their own items and build upon the foundation of the box. We equally have that to.

Gift ideas for Birth Parents

When choosing a gift for Birth Parents we went for a Keepsake idea of “Something money cannot buy”.

Anyone can buy a Mum necklace or Dad cap, we wanted to add something that could only have come from their Child and they had helped make. We were assisted by Baby to make an aspect of every gift personal from their child. Some of the gifts we have made are:

- **Canvass decorated** for the occasion (Birthday, Easter, Christmas etc) with Child’s handprint and/or footprint
- **Castings of Child’s hand or footprint** made into a plaque, or decoration
- **Painted, collage or drawn pictures** made with Birth Parents in mind
- **Cards** made with contributions (drawing, hand print, photograph, collage) from the Child
- **Large piece of paper painted** by Child used as wrapping paper



A good practice guide for managing family time

Appendix 5 – What to include in a changing bag for family time

It is advised that EP carers have two changing bags one being for family time that can be stocked and ready to go.

Things to include in the changing bag include:

- Sterilised bottles and Formula or breast milk (provided by mother)
- Nappies, wipes and any creams. Suggest providing water wipes for very young children as cotton wool and water may not be practical.
- At least 2 sets of clothing. Preferably clothes parents have provided.
- Blanket, dummies & soft toys – preferably ones parents have provided.
- Red Book & communication diary. Be mindful of confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Ensure any creams medication etc have any identifying features on the labels blanked out including the name of the pharmacy, as this could identify what area you live in.

Red Book - Ensure your full names and address is not written within this book

Communication Dairy: record information and if you share going to parks etc do not name the places. If you share photographs, ensure they are just of the child and **not displaying names of places in the background.**

Appendix 6 – Family time information and advice for EP carers

Family time that is well managed, consistent, supportive and well supported can be fundamental in establishing positive working relationships between a child's parents and carers. We firmly believe that establishing such relationships can only benefit the child, whatever the outcome.

The purpose of Family Time

In Early Permanence Placements the purpose of contact is threefold:

1. To maintain children's relationships with their family. Family time should be a positive, enjoyable and child-centred experience.
2. To assess the quality of interactions between parents and their child and provide evidence as to whether the parents can respond to and meet the needs of their child consistently. Parents should be given an opportunity to develop their basic parenting skills and this may include feeding, bathing etc.
3. To meet the child's needs in relation to their identity and life story should the child go on to be adopted. The family time worker should take photos of the child and their parents during family time for the purposes of life story work.

Frequency and Duration of Family Time

The level of family time is decided by the court; this could be potentially 3 times a week but can be as much as five times a week. Family time is a big commitment for you as carers and the need for organisation is key.

Our Tips include:

- Preparation – ensure that you know where you are going and allowing enough time to get there.
- Ensure that you have all the equipment you need, having a separate bag for contact is helpful so you are not transferring things from one bag to another.
- Ensure you have extra feeds for the child if you are travelling a distance.
- Be prepared that other family members may request family time so there is a possibility that you may have to bring the child to an extra contact.
- The frequency and duration of the family time sessions may change over time. For example if the parent's assessment is positive there may be an increase in contact to test out how parents manage over a longer period of time. However, if the assessment is negative or if parents are inconsistent in attending then the local authority may return to court and ask for a reduction in family time. If the care plan for the child is to be adoption then family time will reduce after the final court hearing.
- If the plan is rehabilitation back to birth family, there will be a detailed plan put into place but this will be a different routine that you and the child are familiar with. You need to ensure that you communicate with your social worker throughout this process to ensure you get the support you need.

Equipment

It is advised that you have a separate bag that you use for family time. Within the bag, there should be the following basic equipment:

- Nappies, please ensure there are enough nappies in the bag for the length of the session.
- A set of spare clothes
- Sterilised bottles
- Formula in a dispenser and enough for the length of contact.
- Nappy bags
- Travel Bottle warmer (some venues don't have access to a kettle/ hot water).
- Water wipes, again these are useful if there is not access to water.
- Bibs or Muslim cloths
- Dummies/ soothers contained in a sterile container.
- Blankets, hats, sun cream etc.
- Communication book
- Any medication that a child may need.

Communication Book

We ask carers to keep a communication book that is shared with birth family and is kept in the changing bag, this book needs to be completed daily even on non-contact days. Tips for the communication book:

- Keep the information and do not include information that can easily identify you.
- Times of feeds and amount taken for babies or what they have eaten for older children.
- Any changes in feeds/ routines
- How the child has slept
- Any activities you have undertaken- please be mindful as to how the parent may feel though that you are able to take their child to groups and activities that they cannot.
- Nappy changes
- Visits from Health visitors or visits to the GP/hospital
- Please verbalise some of this information at handover so contact supervisors are alerted to issues.

Handovers

This is an important part of your role as EP carers as it is the basis of building a relationship with the family of the child you are caring for. You will never be left alone with the child's parents and the family time worker will support you to provide a handover.

- When you arrive with the child you will be taken to the contact room by the family time worker/ supervisor. Please ensure you leave the child in the car seat or pushchair and immediately pass the child to their parent/s. This is your opportunity to inform the parent of how the child has been, again use factual information. The contact supervisor will be there to support you with this and will ask prompting questions if needed.
- Please don't feel you need to give the information then rush out, as you get to know the parents you will begin to find a balance. It may be that they have some questions for you about their child.

As you get to know the parent, you might ask them questions for example does the child's name have a special significance, where did they get their hair colouring from etc.

- Handovers at the end are a reverse of the beginning and the family time worker will encourage parents to give verbal information to you on how the child has been within the contact. This can be very daunting initially for parents and they may need a lot of support. Please be patient and don't take it personally if they don't feel able to look at you or speak to you initially.

Impact of family time on carers

EP training seeks to prepare carers as much as possible for family time and make you aware of some of the challenges, however in our experience carers are often surprised at the impact that contact has on them, their emotions and the frustrations that come with it.

- You will not have information as to how the family time sessions/ assessment of the parents is going, this isn't your information.
- There are often changes in contact times, days etc. This will feel out of your control.
- We ask that you do not stay at the contact venue, if there are facilities away from the venue for a coffee then we would suggest you go there and use your time wisely. Please ensure that your mobile is switched on the family time worker can contact you if needed.
- You will feel frustrated and annoyed at times, talk to your social worker they are there to support you but please do not let any frustrations show to the child's parents.
- At times the child's parents may feel critical of you or ask for you to do something you are not able to do (i.e weaning early etc). Always advise the child's parents that you would need to speak to the health visitor or other professional for advice.

You may feel very mixed emotions as the placement progresses. For example, you may be disappointed for the child if the parent doesn't attend whilst also feeling that this is a positive as it may mean the child may stay with you. These feelings can be uncomfortable and conflicting but are shared by many EP carers. Speak to your social worker or members of your support network who understand and can support you through this journey.

Appendix 7 – Pledge

Our Pledge to maintain Children’s Relationships in Early Permanence Placements

Early Permanence placements, where the decision has not yet been taken by the courts whether to rehabilitate a child to their family of origin or to make an adoption order are extremely beneficial for the child. In all Early Permanence placements, prospective carers should be well prepared to deal with uncertainty but also to support family time arrangements between a child and their family.

The aim of this pledge is to ensure that ‘Standard 6’ of the **National Standards for Early Permanence*** are met and that children’s significant relationships in Early Permanence placements are maintained and supported. Specifically we aim to ensure that:

1. That all Early Permanence carers can see the benefits of ongoing family time and are suitably prepared to manage contact arrangements for the child/children in their care and have empathy for the child’s parents.
2. Family time is a positive experience for the child by ensuring family time is of good quality and is facilitated in a warm and nurturing environment; thus improving the quality of the experience for children and their parents.
3. We support relationships by ensuring that that parents and Early Permanence carers have the opportunity to meet and develop positive working relationships via handovers at family time and that these handovers are safely and appropriately managed by family time workers. Such relationships will be in the best interest of the child in the longer term.
4. That workers facilitating Early Permanence family time have a good understanding of some of the challenges and complexities of contact in an Early Permanence placement and that they have the skills to positively support contact and ‘scaffold’ the relationship between parents and carers.
5. That there is clear and consistent communication between the child’s social worker, family time worker and the supervising social worker for the Early Permanence carers.

We [Local Authority], will ensure that for family time in all Early Permanence Placements **we will:**

1. Provide parents with written and verbal information to help them to understand what an Early Permanence placement is.
2. Draw up a working agreement, prior to family commencing, that is signed by all involved. The agreement will set out expectations for parents and what they can expect of the family time team. We will review this agreement periodically.
3. Provide a consistent contact worker/ workers
4. Provide a consistent venue and at a regular time-slot for family time. Our venue will be warm, nurturing and consistent.

5. Provide quality support and supervision of family time that is consistent for each child, birth parent and EP carer.
6. Ensure consistent care for children and as such we expect that Early Permanence carers will be responsible for transporting children to/from family time and have some face to face contact with the child's parent/s via a handover at the beginning and end of each session (except in very exceptional circumstances based on a clear risk assessment).
7. Encourage the carers to provide a verbal handover at the beginning of contact and the parents will provide a handover at the end of contact to the carers to ensure consistency for the child. The family time worker will need to support and encourage this relationship between parents and carers. Ensure handovers will always take place in the contact room and never in the foyer/ shared space.
8. Provide feedback to parents at the end of each family time session.

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