



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service



**AFA CYMRU**  
association for fostering and adoption  
cymdeithas ar gyfer maethu a mabwysiadu

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

# Transitions and Early Support

2



Contact

1

Working with Birth Parents

3

Adoption Support

4

# Contents

Introduction .....	3	Acknowledgements .....	39
The status and purpose of this guide .....	5	References .....	40
How this guide works and how users can make the most of it .....	6	Appendix 1: Sibling Alliance Call and Pledge .....	42
2.1 Care proceedings .....	9	Appendix 2: Who this guide is intended for, abbreviations and terminology .....	43
2.2 Placement Order proceedings .....	12	Appendix 3: Full legal references to legislation and regulations cited in the guide .....	44
2.3 Family finding .....	13	Appendix 4 for Key Performance Measures relating to Life Journey Work .....	48
2.4 Linking .....	17	Appendix 5: Activities and books that can be used in direct work with the child .....	49
2.5 Matching planning .....	19	Appendix 6: Delegation of Parental Responsibility checklist .....	52
2.6 Matching Panel .....	24		
2.7 Introductions planning .....	26		
2.8 Introductions .....	30		
2.9 Placement .....	34		
2.10 Early weeks and months .....	36		
2.11 Decision to apply for an Adoption Order .....	38		
2.12 Adoption Order proceedings .....	38		
2.13 Post Adoption Order .....	39		

This good practice guide has been produced by AFA Cymru.  
It has been commissioned and funded by the National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS).

All rights reserved. This document may not be reproduced without the permission of the  
National Adoption Service for Wales.

Cover illustration: Jess Coldrick

# Introduction

When children cannot safely return home from care, adoption provides legal security, love and belonging in a new family. However, adoption also means that the child, who has suffered early trauma and loss, must also be separated from a foster family where they have felt secure and loved, as well as from familiar routines and surroundings (Neil et al 2020). Although practitioners and carers undoubtedly have the best interests of the child at heart, they may not always know and fully understand the impact of early trauma and loss and express uncertainty about how to plan, respond and support a child in their move to a new family.

Children are amazing in their capacity to adapt, they have had to be; but exposure to early adversity such as abuse and neglect in childhood and the loss of significant people in their lives affects all areas of a child's development, their attachment patterns, and their belief about self, and can have far reaching developmental consequences (Grotevant and McDermott, 2014; Rutter, 2005 in Neil, Young & Hartley, 2018). A child's behaviour is their response to circumstances they find themselves in and is their language of communication with the adults around them; the dictionary of that language is their history.

***“If we can understand what was or may have been happening for the child during his or her early life we can begin to consider and try to understand the impact this may have had upon his/her understanding of the world.”***

(Understanding the Child. SEWAS service model)

Adopters have highlighted the transition period as a significant but problematic stage in their overall adoption journey and cited considerable inconsistency in the approach to practice which affected their experiences (Lewis, 2018). Difficult transitions have also been highlighted as having long term negative impacts on new families (Neil, 2020; Norris 2019a, 2019b). Research has found that the emotional experience of the child, particularly their experience of losing their foster carer, loses centre stage in people's minds during the transition to a new family, leading to what is described as a “blind spot” (Boswell and Cudmore, 2017). Struggling with conflicting emotions and anxieties of their own, adults have tended to interpret a child's behaviour, for example, of compliance and lack of distress as them being “fine” rather than questioning what might be going on at a deeper level. (Boswell and Cudmore, 2014, 2017).

Traditionally, the move to adoption has generally taken between 5 – 14 days, usually depending on the age of the child. Selwyn et al (2015) found that both foster carers and adopters felt they had not been given adequate information about the child placed with them and consistent feedback from adopters on post placement challenges state that they wished they had been better prepared (Neil et al., 2018b). After their move, typically children have not seen their foster carer, usually for at least 6-12 weeks, and for some there is no further contact (Neil, 2018a). Abrupt moves are highly distressing for the child and for adopters and foster carers, and if not handled sensitively can have a long term impact on children's development, in some cases threatening the success of the adoptive placement (Selwyn et al., 2015).

Across Wales, practice in transitions to adoption has been changing in response to a growing body of research that calls for a more evidenced based approach that allows for greater planning and scrutiny and is in the best interests of each child. This guide highlights best practice in Wales along with key principles from evidence-based models of transitions, Moving to Adoption (University of East Anglia) and “By your Side” (The Family Place) that intertwine to offer an attachment and trauma informed framework for navigating transitions to adoption and a coordinated approach for early support.

This framework will consolidate and build on current practice across Wales and can be used with all children with a plan for adoption, although it is acknowledged that some children will require specialist services with additional support, such as Adopting Together. Although some regions will have a dedicated transitions worker and psychology support, this will not preclude those who do not from following the principles in the guide and adapting within their service. The framework incorporates attachment and trauma informed learning and support; a recognition of the benefits of providing opportunities to develop positive relationships across the network and especially between foster carers and adopters; the benefits of enduring relationships with foster carers (Neil, 2018); and planning that is bespoke to each child and family.

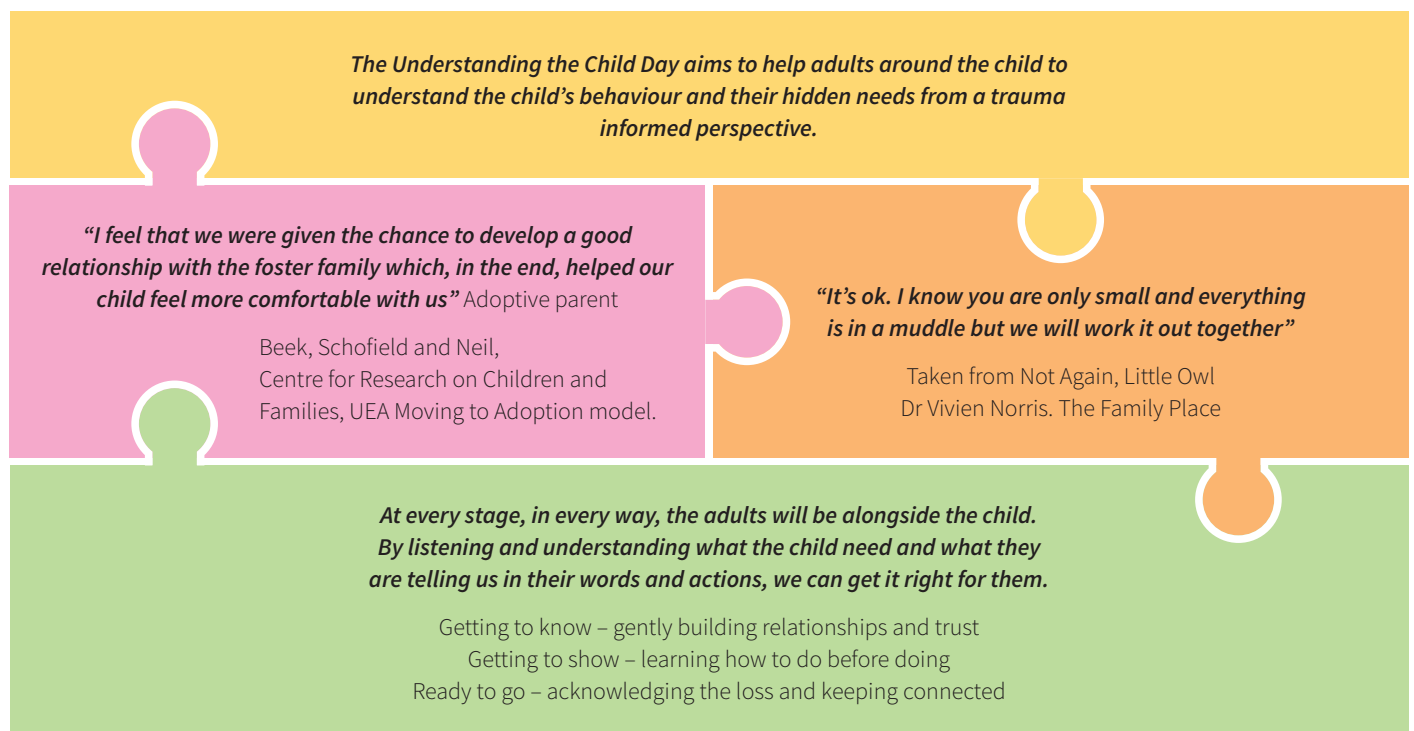
At every stage of the process, the guide focuses on key aspects that will help adoptive families become realistic about what to expect and as prepared as they can be to offer sensitive caregiving to the child whilst recognising that ongoing support is an accepted part of adoptive parenting.

The **trauma/nurture timeline** and **Understanding the Child** meeting outlined within this approach are central to helping adopters understand and interpret a child's responses and not just take them at face value, and to help them offer a sensitive and reflective parenting approach to aid recovery. *“Realistic expectations and a sense of “preparedness” provides a strong foundation for starting out in the adoptive parenting journey”* (Getting it Right. SEWAS service model). Equally as important is the direct work plan with the child to help them understand what has happened and what will be happening, and who will be with them on their journey.

The three stage process **Getting to Know, Getting to show, Ready to Go** allows for the gradual development of relationships and trust that does not replicate past experiences of trauma, and which allows children to feel safe and secure with adults who understand them and can help them regulate by their sensitive and empathic responses. (Neil et al, 2018a). It recognises the importance of the **foster care relationship** for the child and how sustaining this is in their best interest. At each stage, it is recognized that the adults around the child need to be emotionally robust enough to hold big emotions, without becoming overwhelmed themselves. They also need to be emotionally supported as does the child and guided through the inevitable stresses in the early days, weeks and months (Norris, 2019a, 2019b)

We recognise that relationships are key to holding the structure of the team around the child and the child's inner world together and are central to the success of any intervention. The guide highlights the importance of a consistent interagency approach from the early stages, and at each stage, of the child's journey. Each practitioner will have a distinct role but will share a common sense of purpose and understanding of the child's needs, desired outcomes and route to achieving these. It is only with a focused, relational based and holistic approach that we can improve outcomes for children but also the trust, communication and relationships in the team around the child, thereby ensuring adoptive families are well prepared and supported in the challenges ahead.

For ease of reference, the singular word “child” is used throughout this guide, although it is recognised that a significant number of children will be placed for adoption with their brothers and sisters. Each individual child will have unique experiences and understanding of their circumstances, and unique needs, and therefore any work plan needs to reflect this as well as the inter sibling relationship and experience.



## The status and purpose of this guide

The guide is constructed to build upon the existing legal framework for adoption and adoption support in Wales and is designed to build upon good practice and develop a pan Wales approach. It is the expectation of the National Adoption Service that the guide will ensure that all those in receipt of adoption or adoption support services in Wales will have access to the same quality of service.

The guide is being drafted at a time where the regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies in Wales are making great progress in developing adoption and adoption support services. These guides aim to reflect that progress.

The guide does not offer strict advice about the timescales and specific plans that should be made. A 'one size fits all' approach may seem helpful, however, in practice this can lead to a loss of focus on what truly matters, the specific needs of 'this child' transitioning to 'this family'.

### The guiding principles for this guide are as follows:

- Early trauma can affect all areas of a child's development, their attachments, belief about self, responses and behaviour
- Only when adopters are realistically prepared and supported by professionals to understand the child's experience, responses and how they respond to others, and to develop empathic parenting strategies, can recovery for the child begin to happen
- A trauma informed approach to care planning, transitions and ongoing support enables child centred planning and promotes a strong foundation and better outcomes
- All children need to understand their narrative and their journey to adoption, their voice needs to be heard, and they need to continue to feel connected to trusted adults
- Relationships are key. Opportunities to develop and sustain trusting relationships should be prioritised and supported; this can help address issues that limit successful transitions and can prevent issues from arising later in life.
- Effective collaborative working between professionals is essential. There needs to be a common goal and understanding of the work being done and emotionally intelligent skills to build and maintain relationships and understand the perspective of others.

### At the heart of all that we do should be the voice of the child:

- I have a right to understand that it is not my fault my birth parents could not look after me
- I have a right to expect any decision making and outcomes to take account of my particular experiences as a black or minority ethnic child and to respect my ethnicity and cultural heritage.
- I have a right to understand why I cannot live with my birth family
- I have a right to understand why I could or could not live with my brothers and sisters
- I have a right to understand why adoption was chosen for me
- I have a right to understand why this particular family was chosen for me
- I have a right to understand why the current 'keeping in touch' (contact) arrangements were made
- I have a right to keep in touch with my birth family if it is helpful and safe for me to do so
- My birth parents will receive support to help them keep in touch (contact) with me where that has been agreed
- I have a right to keep in touch with other people who are important to me for example foster carers where it is helpful and safe for me to do so
- When thinking about what I need professionals will think about the whole of my childhood not just the here and now.

All guides have taken into account the Sibling Alliance call and pledge, the principles of which are embedded in the guides.

See Appendix 1



## How this guide works and how users can make the most of it

This guide stands alone. However, it can also be used in conjunction with three other guides. They cover:

- Contact
- Working with Birth Parents
- Post Adoption Support

Each of these guides is set out separately and discretely. However, in order for the practitioner and, in particular, the child's social worker to gain maximum benefit from each guide, they are ordered chronologically and numbered, so that there will be ease of reference for a practitioner to consider. For example, they can look at what needs to be considered at the family finding stage for each of the four guides (1.3, 2.3, 3.3, and 4.3). The following diagram should help to navigate the guide.

See **Appendix 2** for full details of professionals this guide is intended for, abbreviations and terminology.

STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
<b>CARE PROCEEDINGS</b> <b>1</b>	CSW – family meeting.  CSW – ensure CAR/B has sufficient information to inform contact plan.  CSW – LJW.  ASW advice and support to CSW.	CSW to invite ASW to 2nd LAC review.  AA will allocate ASW to work with birth family.  CSW ensures that there is a detailed chronology, pre birth and up to the present.  CSW undertakes LJW.  IRO to monitor progress of LJW.	CSW – family meeting should take place if not happened in PLO.  CSW ensures birth family understand adoption is one option in planning.  CSW makes referral to region for support in adoption planning.  ASW provides 'birth parent counselling'.  CSW & ASW -referral to Reflect.  CSW – LJW.	CSW – identifying child's long term needs in care plan and in CAR/B.  ASW attends 2nd LAC review to advise on possible AS needs.  ASW – PA's support plan in the PAR.
<b>PLACEMENT ORDER PROCEEDINGS</b> <b>2</b>	CSW- care plan /CAR/B / plan for S26 and post adoption contact.  CSW – plan for sibling contact	CSW- CAR/B forms the basis of the trauma/ nurture timeline.  CSW & ASW plan for 'moving on' narrative.	CSW and ASW agree on effective communication with BP's.  CSW plans for s26 contact	ASW to provide support to inexperienced CSW in writing the CAR/B.  CSW – identifying child's long term support needs in the CAR/B.
<b>FAMILY FINDING</b> <b>3</b>	CSW – reducing / goodbye contacts under s26 ACA..  CSW – work with child and foster carer to ensure child understands why contact pattern is changing.  ASW – to assist with the above.	CSW – updating CAR/B on child's progress.  CSW & ASW identify how PA's will meet needs of child during transition and early support needs when looking at range of PAR's.  CSW and ASW agree roles and responsibilities for direct work plan.	CSW – keeping parents informed of progress.  CSW works with BP's and other BF members of s26 contact plan.  CSW – updates CAR/B on basis of any further information from birth family.	CSW – updating CAR/B on child's progress.  ASW prepares trauma/ nurture timeline from CAR/B information and identifies possible support needs.  AA provides support to the PA's by way of universal adoption support services.

STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
<b>LINKING</b> 4	CSW – updates CAR/B.  CSW & ASW – liaising with PA's and testing their commitment to child's identified contact plan.  CSW – LJW.	ASW shares CAR'B and trauma timeline with PA's.  CSW & ASW visit PA's home.  CSW and ASW help PA's to understand needs of this child.  PA's and FC's meet to develop relationship before the Understanding the Child Meeting.	CSW – keeps parents informed of progress, supported by ASW.  CSW and ASW to plan for meeting between BP's and PA's.	CSW provides PA's with all the information on the child.  ASW and CSW hold the 'understanding the child' meeting from which support needs may become apparent.  CSW & ASW supporting PA's if application for leave to revoke PO is made.
<b>MATCHING PLANNING</b> 5	CSW & ASW putting together contact component of adoption support plan .  CSW – plan for farewell contact.  CSW and ASW – plan for meeting between BP's and PA's.	Understanding the Child Meeting takes place.  PA's have period of reflection.  Further informal contact between PA's and FC's.  Direct work with child.  CSW, with help from ASW completes APR and ASP.  Possible child viewing.  Planning for meeting with BP's and PA's.	CSW – keeps parents informed of progress (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications).  CSW & ASW to liaise on farewell contact arrangements and support to be offered to BP's.	CSW & ASW look at both child's specific support needs and PA's strengths and vulnerabilities to inform adoption support plan.  CSW, with help from ASW, completes  APR and ASP which are shared with PA's
<b>MATCHING PANEL / ADM</b> 6	Panel and ADM to consider the proposed contact plan	Panel and ADM to consider matching paperwork and report from the UtCM.	CSW – keeping parents informed (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications).  CSW & ASW to consider arrangements for BP and PA meeting.	Panel and ADM to consider whether support plan is fit for purpose and recommend/ approve match
<b>INTRODUCTIONS PLANNING</b> 7	CSW and ASW –  Plan for connections with foster carers to be maintained following transitions.  Meeting with BP & PA's.	ASW & CSW– allocation of PR agreement.  ASW plans introductions planning meeting.  Direct work with child.	CSW – keeps parents informed.  Meeting with PA's and BP's takes place.  Meeting with PA's and other members of BF (eg older siblings ) takes place	CSW and ASW involve health and / or education in planning where appropriate
<b>INTRODUCTIONS</b> 8	ASW and FSW to assist FC's and PA's in forging a relationship that will sustain a level of contact.	ASW to lead on three step approach to introductions.  Direct work with child.  ASW leads review.	CSW – keeping BP's informed of date of introductions (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications).	CSW and ASW to amend support plan if additional needs come to light during introductions



STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
<b>PLACEMENT</b> 9	CSW, ASW and FSW to ensure contact with foster carer takes place.	ASW provides continued support.  Direct work with child.  Contact with FC.	CSW and ASW – PR agreement with PA's.	ASW & CSW will review the support plan if additional needs of the new family emerge
<b>EARLY WEEKS / MONTHS</b> 10	ASW ensures that settling in letter is sent to birth parents and others (within 6 weeks).  ASW, CSW and IRO support PA's and BP's in establishing a contact pattern.	CSW – statutory visits and reviews.  IRO – reviews.  ASW – continued support.  Contact with FC's.	ASW & CSW – support PA's to send settling in letter to BP's.  IRO to ensure letter has been sent.	CSW – statutory visits.  IRO – reviews.  ASW – continuing support.  All involved providing reassurance that early weeks and months can often be difficult.
<b>DECISION TO APPLY FOR AO</b> 11	ASW & CSW – contact plan and contact support plan in Annex A.	Decision made following review and in consultation with PA's and ASW.	CSW – notice of hearing to parents (regs).  ASW and CSW consider support to be given to BP's re hearing.	CSW & ASW support PA's in any application for leave to contest the making of the Adoption Order
<b>AO PROCEEDINGS</b> 12	CSW & ASW to ensure that post adoption contact agreements are understood, committed to and signed	CSW – statutory visits.  ASW – continued support.	CSW & ASW complete Annex A.  CSW to update CAR/B following final hearing to incorporate judgment.	CSW & ASW to ensure that support plan has been reviewed in anticipation of the Adoption Order being made
<b>POST AO</b> 13	ASW / support team / VAASW support where appropriate and assess and review for adoption support needs relating to contact .	N/A	ASW/ region – commencement of, or continued support with, contact  ASW / region – general support to BP's.  ASW – continued communication and exchange of information	ASW / regional support where relevant.  Post adoption support plan to set out what to be provided to the child and to the family and an agreement for review or 'keeping in touch'

Each section in the guide sets out:

- 1) **The legal framework**, where appropriate, with any **relevant statute set out in red**, **regulations in blue** and **case law and general legal principles in green**. Where there is a reference to the **Adoption and Children Act 2002** or the **Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005**, a full note of the **section** or **regulation** may be found in **Appendix 3**;
- 2) **What needs to happen** to achieve good practice and what must be done by the child's social worker and / or the adoption social worker as well as other professionals involved in the child's plan.



### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Within care proceedings the child's final care plan, submitted to the court for the final hearing, will detail the child's needs for permanency. The Child's Adoption Report/ Annex B Report (CAR/B) combines two reports, the CAR being required by the adoption agency for a should be placed for adoption decision (regulation 17 Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005) and the Annex B being required for the application for a Placement Order (The Family Procedure Rules 2010). This document will require an analysis of the child's needs sufficiently detailed in providing a full and lively picture of the child in order for it to be fit for purpose as a linking and matching tool. Some of the detail contained in the CAR/B, particularly information obtained from the foster carer, will provide a foundation for the transition plan.

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Children are affected and shaped by their experiences. For children who have experienced developmental trauma (Van der Kolk, 2005), there are misunderstandings about the way in which babies and young children "remember" their experiences.

Neuro-scientific evidence has shown that the impact of trauma, including alcohol and substance misuse, poor parental mental health and abusive relationships, affect a child's genetic make-up and pre-disposition to stress pre-birth. When proximity and comfort from primary caregivers is not available, young babies and children experience ongoing chronic stress which continues to affect the development of their brain. They absorb their experiences as part of their reality and use them to develop their way of being resulting in insecure and disorganised attachment patterns. (Elliot, 2013)

A thorough understanding of a child's history is therefore essential if we are going to understand the impact of trauma and make the right decisions for their future and begin to address this with the right strategies to make a substantial difference to their lives.

Refer to **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**.

### Information sharing and Support

- Regional adoption teams are available for advice and support on adoption planning including prior to, or at an early stage of care proceedings. Whilst it is acknowledged that each region has its own protocol for accepting referrals, this general principle stands.
- When multi-track planning includes the plan for adoption, there needs to be early and proactive contact between the CSW and the regional adoption service at the earliest opportunity.
- It is acknowledged that each region has its own protocol for allocation; the ASW role referred to in this guide sits within the family finding service unless otherwise specified although it is recognised that collaboration and support from other professionals will be needed.
- CSW and ASW to be clear about respective roles and how information will be shared.
- CSW to invite ASW to 2nd Review.
- Regional adoption teams will allocate an ASW to work with the child's birth family. It is acknowledged that each region has its own protocol for allocation (in some regions practitioners are from Adoption Support and in others from the Family Finding team), there needs to be some common guiding principles borne in mind in relation to allocation of the ASW.

Refer to **NAS Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**.

### Case work

- The CSW will receive appropriate training to equip them for their role. They will need to have a good knowledge and understanding of child development and attachment and an understanding of how trauma impacts the child's development and communication.
- The CSW will ensure that all reports written in respect of the child are evidence based, clear, concise and analytical.
- The CSW needs to engage in a systematic gathering of comprehensive information that provides a detailed chronology of a child's experience pre birth and up to the present.
- Analysis of this information from a trauma informed perspective forms the basis of the child's trauma timeline (See Family Finding section) and Understanding the Child meeting (See Matching Planning section), and early identification of the child's support needs. It will also help identify the support needs of current carers and the characteristics and support needs of future carers.

Siblings

- The CSW will provide evidence-based analysis of the dynamics and needs of siblings within the CAR/B.
- The CSW will receive training and support which enables them to carefully consider and analyse whether siblings should be placed together or apart. Where appropriate this will be informed by a psychology assessment.

Refer to the NAS **Contact** and **Adoption Support Good Practice Guides**.

*“This analysis is crucial in helping professionals [and the court] to reflect and understand what has happened for the child, what it means for the child, and what the best plan is for the child”.*

Cafcass Cymru



CORE PRINCIPAL

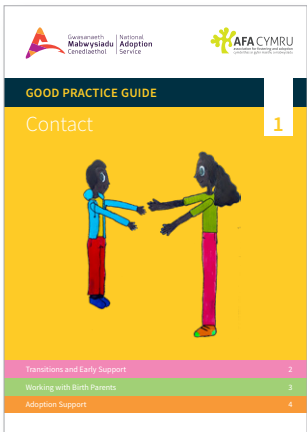
WORK WITH FOSTER CARERS

Good quality foster care that provides a safe, supportive and nurturing environment can act as a protective factor for children whose birth families cannot take care of them. It can help a child start to co-regulate within a trusting relationship. Continuity of care, with as few placement moves as possible, is also important for children’s future healthy development and for adoption placement stability (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Sometimes, concerns are expressed that a child who feels loved and fully included in the foster family will find it harder to settle with their adoptive parents. However, we know that this is not the case. Rather, loving and trusting relationships in foster care help a child form a solid foundation for building trust in a new family (Neil 2020). By working towards the child developing a secure attachment to them as their primary carer, foster carers are providing a positive template for the parent child relationship in the future

So, the role of the foster carer is critical. Geiger et al (2013) highlight the need for social workers to provide recognition, respect and encouragement to foster carers for their dedication and efforts with children, and emphasises the importance of foster carers being heard and having their thoughts and feelings taken into account when decisions are being made about the child. This is especially important, not only in recognition of the key role they play now but will continue to play as the child moves to their new family.

- Comprehensive training and support during preparation and assessment from an attachment and trauma informed perspective will need to be provided to foster carers to equip them for their role, the key part they play in moving a child to adoption, and in their ongoing contact with the family.
- The more successful the foster carer is in fulfilling their role, the more stressful and painful, but rewarding, it is likely to be. Any difficulties will impact on the outcome for the child, for example, foster carers who feel supported are more likely to “stick” with the task of caring for children (Cairns, 2002)
- The role of the SSW is critical in supporting the foster carer to understand their role as a positive attachment figure for the child. If the foster carer trusts their SSW and is encouraged to have a secure attachment to them, this provides a model of how they should be with the child. Each agency has a responsibility not only to advocate a trauma informed attachment based approach to fostering but also to model it in their care of their foster carers.
- Consideration needs to be given to joint training with foster carers and adoptive parents, and also with child care, fostering and adoption social workers. Learning from each other and learning together builds trust and respect; empathy is one of the key interpersonal skills that support successful relationships and collaboration.



## Life Journey Work

*“Consideration should be given to the child’s relationship and identity needs not just in the near future, but later in their life: what and who will the child want and need to know”*

Neil and Beek, 2020

*“The life journey book for our second child is so much more comprehensive than the one our eldest child received. That’s great for her, but really hard for her older sister. Life journey books help fill in the missing pieces, our youngest child’s book shares lots of little details, that could so easily have been lost, but are so important”*

Adoptive parent

- The CSW is responsible for ensuring Life Journey Work (LJW) for the child begins as soon as the child becomes looked after and is ongoing. The gathering of information from a wide range of sources (e.g. health, education) and from significant people involved in their lives (e.g. birth parents, grandparents, other family members) can help the child understand their place within their birth family and their life experiences before moving to their foster carers.
- Gradually, as the child begins to feel safe and is ready and able to explore difficult memories and emotions, they can start to make sense of their experiences and develop a coherent narrative.

*“I found the new approach to life journey work so much easier, now that we are collecting information from the very start of a child being accommodated. It made writing the later life letter a lot easier and there were so many photos and anecdotes for the life journey book”*

Social worker in child care team

- Any early direct work with the child will be planned and undertaken in conjunction with the child’s foster carer/s and with the CSW taking the lead. This work will help a child understand why they were removed from their birth family and placed with a foster family and what a foster family or “looking after” family’s role is.

Refer to the NAS LJW Good Practice Guide.

See **Appendix 4** for Key Performance Measures relating to Life Journey Work and information on the different Life Journey books that are created for the child

## Work with birth family

- Birth parents are likely to struggle to provide information during and following painful proceedings and placement of the child and need appropriate support.

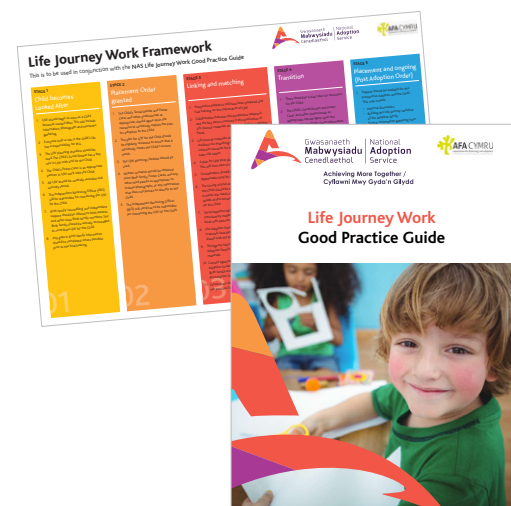
Refer to NAS **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**.

- The CSW might have a strained relationship with the birth family and considerable workload pressure; however, priority does need to be given to this work as the information is relevant, not only for the child in understanding their narrative, but also in helping the foster carer and CSW understand the child’s life before being accommodated and how best to meet their needs. It is an important foundation for further direct work once the child’s care plan has been agreed, and the specific direct work plan should the plan be adoption.
- Depending on the nature of the relationship birth parents have with the child’s social worker, and the support needs of the birth family, a decision needs to be made whether birth parents should be given some Life Journey materials to complete themselves (electronically or paper version) when their child comes into care.
- The IRO will monitor progress of LJW as part of the review process, including the decision to ask birth parents to complete this work and their view with regards to filling in these sections, particularly as foster carers, contact workers, school and health professionals are asked to complete similar sections.
- If parents do not directly contribute, either because they refuse, are unable to or have poor communication with social workers, then these will be completed by either the CSW or another allocated worker within the child care team who has access to the child’s file and is able to engage family members for the purposes of gathering the information.

## Work with foster carers

- The foster carer, with support from the SSW and CSW, will undertake LJW with the child, which could include a Looking after family book, some written materials, drawings and a Memory box.

For Life Journey Work resources, refer to NAS Life Journey Work online archive for birth parents and child care practitioners working with birth parents



# Placement Order Proceedings

## 2.2

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The CAR/B report will be submitted to court as part of the Placement Order application. If there is (unusually) a period of time between care and placement hearings, the CAR/B should be updated, particularly in respect of the child's progress and development.

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

The CAR/B must be accurate and thorough, reflecting the information known by the Local Authority and will reflect the child's needs now and in the future. Poor quality reports have been cited as a key factor in adoption breakdown. Missing information leads to poor matching, ill prepared families and inadequately supported children (Dance and Farmer, 2015 and Selwyn, 2014).

The CAR/B is a live document that can be added to as information is known. It is the main source of information that a child can access as an adult, and which permanent carers can refer to in helping them understand a child's needs.

#### Case work

- The CSW will ensure that the care plan for adoption for the child is evidenced based, considers the lifelong nature of adoption and weighs up the losses and gains for the child throughout their childhood, adolescence and adult life.
- The CAR/B will provide a clear understanding for the child and their family (birth and adoptive) and for the court as to why adoption was necessary and in the best interests of the child (Schofield and Beek, 2006, Rees, 2009 and Fahlberg, 1994). The chronology within the CAR/B forms the basis of the trauma timeline and needs to be sufficiently detailed.

Refer to NAS **Contact** and **Adoption Support Good Practice Guides**

*"Children do not readily talk about their worries and concerns. As social workers and foster carers, we need to pay attention not only to what children say, but also what they don't say and how they behave"*

Social worker

### Collaborative working

- Effective communication should be prioritised between all key people involved, including CSW, ASW, foster carer, SSW, prospective adopters (In some cases, other workers eg a family support worker, transitions worker, psychologist will be allocated and should be included), as well as an understanding of how the impact of the work or external tensions may sometimes affect individuals' ability to respond effectively.

*"I think it is really important that there is good communication between the foster carer's SSW and the CSW and the ASW. They should be included from an early point and certainly in the planning stage for introductions as they usually know the child well. They also play a significant role in supporting the foster carers in sharing information about the child and managing emotions. It is my view and it was my practice to involve them when considering a match due to their knowledge and role"*

Adoption social worker

- Focus of communication should be on clarity of roles and responsibilities, prioritising the needs of the child with the plan, the information that needs to be shared and support that will be required.

### Work with the child

- The ASW will assist the CSW and foster carer (and other significant adults involved in the child's life) in planning and agreeing a sensitive and age appropriate narrative for talking to the child about decisions being made. All adults should be mindful that child needs time and sensitive support from trusted adults to process what is happening and be able to ask questions. See Family finding section for further details on direct work with child.
- The SSW should be aware of the narrative at each stage in order to help the foster carer support the child with any questions or concerns they might have.

Refer to the NAS **Life Journey Work (LJW)** online archive for LJW Good Practice Guide; materials and resources; LJW checklist.

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Even with children whose linking and matching moves quickly from the time of Placement Order, the CAR/B can get out of date quite quickly, particularly in respect of the child's progress and development. The CAR/B therefore needs to be updated on a regular basis, especially if the family finding process is prolonged. Any acceleration of development as a result of being in a settled foster placement should be highlighted, as it may provide a trajectory with which the child's anticipated development can be discussed with prospective adoptive parents.

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Refer to the NAS **Good Practice Guide for Family Finding**

- Due to the inherent complexities in the work, all adoption social work requires a high level of experience and skill, supported by robust and effective professional supervision. In addition to identifying suitable prospective adopters for the child, the ASW takes the lead role in planning and support. All planning and support will be structured to enable the current and proposed carers to focus on the child and their needs for their move to their new family.
- The ASW will access training in trauma informed practice and attachment relevant to their role.
- Each region will have its own arrangements for family finding and the responsibilities within this role. Some regions have dedicated transitions workers, qualified Theraplay practitioners, and dedicated psychology support. Currently, where there is a transitions worker in post, this role is usually employed with more complex cases within the service, excluding those referred to an external specialist service (e.g. Adopting Together). However, if we are to achieve a consistent service to all children, consideration needs to be given to skills set and training needs within all family finding teams.

- Although each region will have its own arrangements for psychology input and support, consideration needs to be given to the clinical supervision requirement of any specialist roles. In addition to individual clinical supervision, there are benefits in providing psychology led reflective practice groups for the family finding team as well as the wider service in order to ensure a consistent delivery approach.
- For practitioners involved in the direct work for transitions with the child (which would include the CSW) baseline training to ensure a consistent approach should be provided with monthly reflective practice / consultation sessions.

#### Case work

- The CSW will frequently make checks and updates to the CAR/B, so it reflects the child's current needs and contains all significant information.
- The ASW should give priority at this stage to developing a relationship with the foster carer in order to better understand the child's needs. They will be the lead professional alongside the CSW during the subsequent stages before, during and after the child's move to a new family.

*"Relationships should be the lens through which all work with individual children, family members and carers should be viewed"*

The Care inquiry, 2013

## CORE PRINCIPAL

### TRAUMA TIMELINE

The ASW will prepare a trauma timeline for the child (also referred to as a Nurture trauma timeline), using the information from the child's CAR/B, Carers' reports, available court reports, discussion with the CSW, foster carer and any other relevant information available.

This is a detailed chronology and analysis of the child's history from before birth until the present time including genetic factors and exposure to trauma.

- All references to "child" are made on the assumption that this is each individual child. Brothers and sisters in the same or different foster families that are being placed together or apart will have different experiences and understanding of their circumstances and so each trauma timeline and work plan needs to reflect this.
- In some cases clinical support might be needed to analyse information gathered and to present in a comprehensive format. The trauma timeline will be used to explore and understand the current and potential future needs of child, by seeking to understand the lived experiences of the child.

This information is then used by the ASW and CSW to consider the child's needs alongside potential matches.

- The CSW and the ASW will identify children that would benefit from additional support or specialist services (eg Adopting Together)



## Direct Work with the child

*"Rabbit said, 'A little owl needs someone to look after her forever. We're going to find you someone new.'*

*'NOT AGAIN!' cried Little Owl. 'PLEASE NOT AGAIN!'*

*And this time Little Owl felt very sad. 'But I wasn't being jumpy or shouty and Badger is my friend,' she said, 'And I don't care about forever,' she said. 'Please, Rabbit, just go away. Please, Badger, make Rabbit go away.'*

From 'Not again, Little Owl' Norris, 2018

If we are to mitigate, or at least minimise the negative impact of loss for the child, we need to work in a way so that children experience some degree of continuity of identity and relationships with birth family members and previous caregivers. Continuity in this context refers to a variety of activities, including open communication within the adoptive family about the child's past relationships and identity (Brodinsky, 2005), respect for items connected to the child's past, and consideration given to a full range of indirect and face to face contact with significant others, (Fahlberg, 2012; Neil & Beek, 2020).

We often talk about a child's move as a positive event, something to be excited about whereas even as adults we are anxious about meeting new people and take time to build trusting relationships. This anxiety is compounded for the child by past trauma, and the adults around the child need to acknowledge this.

*"The main difficulty our child has is to overcome is the separation from his birth siblings and why they will remain in the foster home he grew up in and he did not stay there".*

Neil et al., 2018b

It is essential that children are helped to understand their narrative, and what is happening in a way that enables them to make sense of their feelings and be able to process their loss and grief before moving to their adoptive family. (Schofield and Beek, 2006; Fahlberg, 1994). They can only do this with safe adults that co-regulate with them and support them in sensitive ways. Children also need to be consulted at all stages of their care journey; involving them can improve the quality of the decisions and lead to more stable placements.

- A suggested/proposed direct work plan tailored to the child which prepares them for adoption will be created by the ASW and CSW, and in conjunction with the foster carer and SSW.
- The ASW and CSW will agree roles and responsibilities within the direct work plan, and ensure effective collaboration and communication throughout the duration of the work.



- It is essential to ensure that consistency can be achieved, and that any decision about roles and responsibilities considers the needs of the child and any existing relationship with them. The overall lead for the work should be able to commit to every session in the direct work plan although some of the sessions can be done jointly with the ASW and CSW if appropriate.
- The identified lead will be the consistent person working with the child alongside the foster carer and later the prospective adopters before, during and after their move. This consistency is important as it shows the child that someone is “By their side” on their journey, helping them understand their experiences and relationships. (The Family Place)

*“It is essential that they experience an adult with them who ‘gets it’, who can communicate that they understand in some way how the child is feeling”*

Norris 2017

- The ASW and CSW will work alongside foster carer/s and other professionals to ensure that the child’s needs remain central to all planning, that they are aware of the narrative being used with the child and ensure that consistent messages are given.
- This plan will cover distinct parts of the child’s journey and be completed at different points on that journey (see stages below). There are some key aspects that are critical in this process:
- The use of storybooks/games/rhymes/activities will be used in the build-up to transitions, during the transitions themselves and post transitions by both the foster carers and prospective adopters at appropriate times. These will help to provide the child with an age-appropriate way of understanding what is happening to them, and why and provide a sense of familiarity and continuity.

*“Having a transitions worker really helped us come together in a way that focused on A’s needs. It did seem a bit strange at first, practicing play techniques with strangers, but it made all the difference for A”*

Foster carer



- Each child’s age and level of understanding will need to be considered. Most children do not have a concept of time until they are 5/6 years old which makes it difficult for them to have a concept of the future and timescales. If children are told too soon that they will be moving, they are likely to be flooded with anxiety based on past experiences of change and trauma.

Therefore, it is better that children are not made aware that they will be moving until there are clear plans in place and it is close to the time it will happen. The decision about the timing of the direct work will be based on the individual needs of the child/children.

- The child needs to be helped to express ambivalence and fears and for these to be normalised. Central to this is ensuring that significant people in the child’s life, including school, are informed about what is happening and be given an “appropriate script” and support to enable them to respond in an appropriate way to the child’s feelings rather than to the adult’s perception.

## CORE PRINCIPAL

### DIRECT WORK PLAN

**Stage 1:** Helps the child understand why they need to be in foster care and why they need a new family

**Stage 2:** Helps prepare the child for Farewell contact and to understand why that is needed, and to help them understand what the adoption process looks like.

**Stage 3:** Sharing information with the child about their new family

**Stage 4:** During introductions, bridging the transition between foster care and their move to a new family, to help the child understand that the adopters know and understand their story

**Stage 5:** After the child has moved to their new family (approximately 3 weeks), to refresh the narrative and support the building of attachments

*Adapted from SEWAS service model*

Stage 1 of the direct work plan will be started with a child once the plan for adoption has been confirmed (see **Matching Planning section**). This work will build on the messages that have already been shared with the child by the CSW and foster carer to explain the reason they are in foster care.

Further details for all stages of the plan are included in relevant later sections.



## Work with prospective adopters (in preparation training and during assessment)

- Research has highlighted the value on having a consistent adoption social worker throughout assessment and into transition. If this is not possible due to service organization, priority should be given to ASW developing their relationship with prospective adopters at the earliest opportunity.

*“Our preparation training was invaluable, we learned so much and made friends that have become a lifeline for our family”*

Adoptive parent



- Regional adoption teams and VAAs will provide comprehensive training and support during preparation and assessment to prospective adopters to help them understand the complex needs of children placed for adoption.
- All foster carers and adopters, as well as other professionals involved, will receive training and support to equip them for their role and to understand the model for transitions and early support. This is essential as it requires a different approach from each party compared to traditional moves to adoption
- The addition of a child with a history of neglect / trauma cannot be a seamless transition. Preparation and support need to include existing children in the prospective adopters' family to ensure that the expectations of everyone are realistic. This needs to take account of the fact that the child joining the family will need attention that may take time and attention away from the existing family. Support is needed to prepare, accept and adapt to becoming a new family that meets the practical and emotional needs of all its members, and one which can thrive (Arleta, 2012).
- The assessing adoption social worker will ensure that the PAR has a good level of detail, including potential matching consideration, together with the strengths and potential vulnerabilities of prospective adopters



### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

#### Case work

- A Scrutiny meeting between the ASW and their manager will be convened, to discuss the potential link following collation of information from region/ LA. For VAAs, the ASW will be the prospective adopters assessing / support adoption worker.
- The meeting will consider the background issues and presenting needs of the child/children and the matching considerations of the prospective adopter/s. The meeting will highlight any further information needed/issues to explore, and agree whether or not to pursue this link.
- Following the Scrutiny meeting, the ASW will have further discussion with the CSW about the outcome of the Scrutiny meeting and any key issues identified. If both parties are in agreement, the ASW will arrange to share information with the prospective adopter/s.

#### Work with prospective adopters

- The ASW will share information from the child's CAR/B and other relevant documents, including the **Trauma timeline**, with the prospective adopters in an initial meeting. Prospective adopters will be supported to understand the needs of the child/children, what parenting needs the child has and how well equipped they feel to manage the challenges.
- If parties wish to proceed in exploring the link, a visit to the prospective adopters home will be arranged to include CSW, ASW (both family finding social worker in region and VAA ASW if VAA prospective adopters are being considered).
- During this visit, ASW and CSW will further support the prospective adopters to understand the needs of the particular child / children and get an initial sense about whether this might be the right family for this child / children.
- Following a shared decision by professionals and the prospective adopters that the match is likely to proceed, consideration should be given to convening an **Understanding the Child Day**. An individual approach should always be taken.

Whilst all children will benefit from and need careful consideration of their trauma history and functioning, for very young children with a less complex care history, a whole day event might not be necessary.

#### Joint work with prospective adopters and foster carers

- Prior to the Understanding the Child Day, the foster carers and prospective adopters are supported to meet. This meeting will be supported by the ASW and SSW; there should also be further planned opportunities for contact between the foster carers and prospective adopters from this point.

*"I have been a foster carer for over a decade and moved many children on to adoption. This new way of working is so much better for children, and for the adults involved. It helps from the very start to build relationships and provides clear roles and expectations, in the best interests of the child. I am so pleased that adopters are being encouraged to continue contact and that we are supported to build firm foundations with the adopters from the very start"*

Foster carer



- The primary function of this meeting is to start to develop the relationship between the foster carer and prospective adopter although it will also be the start of the transfer of key information about the child's day to day functioning, and how they are managed. This building of a relationship helps to reduce anxiety and enables the adults to focus on the child rather than be preoccupied with their own anxieties.
- The foster carer will start to share information that will help with continuity of environment, including routines, likes and dislikes, the child's sensory experience. A foster carer might bring a photograph of the child's bedroom so that the prospective adopters can start to think about how they can make the child's new bedroom familiar for them.

*"In order for the adults involved to create a coherent support for the child, it is essential to have a shared language and understanding as well as opportunities to meet, reflect and share information"*

The Family Place

- Prior to this meeting the SSW will need to support the foster carer in writing as much detail as they can about their experience of caring for the child/children. As well as providing details on routines and likes/ dislikes, they can be supported to think what it is like to live with the child and any detailed memories. This can be shared with the Prospective adopters and will also be the basis for the information that can be shared and discussed in the Understanding the Child meeting.
- The SSW can also support the foster carer to write a narrative in the child's voice for the child's new parents
- If siblings are being placed from separate fostering households, consideration must be given to the development of the relationship between all foster carers and the prospective adopters.



Once a child has been removed from a chaotic or traumatic birth family context, the message given to them is that they are safe. As adults work hard to understand underlying needs and interpret behaviour, the child is increasingly able to seek comfort from their main attachment figure, and this is seen as a sign of progress. However, once the idea of a new family is introduced, the focus seems to change abruptly (Norris in Archer et al, 2015). There is potential for there to be mismatched perceptions and these should be acknowledged and talked about in order for the right support to be provided.

- The SSW and the CSW should acknowledge that the foster carers may be experiencing a range of emotions: pride in a job well done, happiness for the child having found a 'growing up family', and sadness for the child moving on from their care.
- The ASW and CSW should acknowledge that the prospective adopters may also be experiencing a range of emotions. They may be overjoyed at hearing about their new child, but also anxious at the prospect of having to spend time with foster carers who will be 'experts' in the care of their prospective adoptive child, anxious about having to spend a lot of time in a stranger's home, anxious about the possibility of not appearing 'good enough', and anxious that a lot of eyes (including a number of Social Workers) are focused on them. They might also feel guilty about "taking the child away" from the foster carer.
- All the adults involved need to acknowledge that, for the child, the move may be terrifying and may, even in very young children, reactivate old traumas. The emphasis and approach need to be on the child having very mixed feelings about moving, but that this is normal and expected.

***"The foster carers for our child... were brilliant. They gave our child a great start in life and continue to be part of our support network."***

Adoptive parents



### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Reg 32 AA(W)R: Proposed placement

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

*“Adoption is life changing for thousands of children but caring for previously looked children isn’t for the faint hearted. Nearly every adoptive parent will face some challenging times. Adopters need to know more about the background of their new child”*

John Timpson, Adoption Barometer 2019

*“I’ve sat in so many distressing meetings with adoptive parents 2 or 3 years down the line when they have said they wished they had known more information about their child sooner with some saying they felt that they’ve been ‘miss sold’ their child”*

Adoption social worker



### CORE PRINCIPAL

#### UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD DAY (UTC)

The Understanding the Child model is rooted in research based practice of developmental trauma, child development and attachment.

The premise of the model is that if we can understand what may have been happening for the child during their early life, we can begin to consider and try to understand the impact this may have had on their understanding of the world.

*“Very reassuring to be given information and an opportunity to explore this. This gave the adopters and myself not only clarity and factual information but reassurance about who the children were, what they needed as well as more certainty about the match – this is a much surer footing in which to begin any adoptive placement”*

Child Social worker

The child’s inner working model influences their emotional and behavioural development and potential for the future.

*“This was a very informative and thought provoking day. I cried, I laughed but overall I came away positive in the knowledge that (the child) was central to the day and with a better understanding of who they are”*

Prospective adopter

By trying to understand a child’s early experiences and behaviours, practitioners and prospective adopters are able to begin to “wonder” about what might be happening for the child in their inner world. This process of “wondering” is the one of the first steps towards parenting therapeutically and is the aim of the UtC meeting.

*“It was a positive experience and beneficial for my own knowledge base and future care planning”*

Child social worker

(Understanding the Child SEWAS service model)

- The Understanding the Child Day (UtC) will be arranged unless they have been referred to a specialist service (e.g. Adopting Together). Priority will be given to those children with more complex histories, older children and sibling groups as the preparation work and length of the UtC meeting will be more time consuming.

\*[NB] For younger children and those with less complex early and care history, it is advised that sufficient time is set aside for careful consideration of their trauma timeline and how their experiences have impacted them by the practitioners involved in their transition.

***“Thank you so much – exceptional day to give us a full understanding of (child’s) life to date – including the bad and the good”***

Prospective adopter



- The UtC will be facilitated by the family finding team, with the lead practitioner who will chair the meeting having the necessary skills and experience. Thought needs to be given to the setting and arrangements for the meeting as it is likely to be both lengthy and emotionally charged for the people involved.

***“It felt safe, nurturing and containing. Thank you”***

Child social worker



- The CSW, the child’s current foster carer, SSW, prospective adopter, ASW will attend the whole event. Throughout the day, key people from the child’s life are invited to attend and share knowledge, experiences and memories of time spent with the child. These could include the child’s previous foster carer, child minder, nursery, school, health visitor, guardian. An Adoption Support social worker could also be invited, and this should always be the case if there are clear and identified support needs.

***“These days are fabulous. Gave a brilliant in depth understanding of the child’s experiences and how this is / may impact them in the future. Was good to see connections being made between foster carers and adopters and education etc. I feel these days will make a big difference”***

Adoption Social worker



- Using the trauma timeline, beginning with pre-birth experiences and working towards the present day, the meeting explores how the child’s inner world (inner working model) has formed. The meeting then begins to consider the child’s behaviours and emotional responses and how these may be best responded to.

Things that will need to be considered during the meeting:

- What is the child’s developing understanding of how they view themselves, and their world, including other people?
- How do they behave when they are anxious or worried? What are their behaviours on these occasions? How do they express other emotions such as anger and sadness? Do they hold them in (and pretend they are ok), or do they overtly demonstrate how they are feeling?
- How is this particular child likely to view the move? What have been their expectations and reactions to change in the past and what might they be now?
- What has been the foster carers’ experience of how the child has reacted to change? How were they when they moved in with the foster carers? Specifically, did they demonstrate particular challenging or dysregulated behaviours, and might these be reactivated again?
- What are the contact arrangements that need to be considered for the child, and how can the prospective adopters be helped to understand the importance of keeping these connections?
- What support does this child and this family need?

Refer to NAS **Contact** and **Adoption Support Good Practice Guides**

- During the final part of the meeting the prospective adopters will be invited to consider their own parenting style, encouraging reflection on what aspects of the child’s behaviour they may find most challenging. This helps to predict and rehearse responses to potential issues, and how they will cope and indicate signs of stress and anxiety for themselves.
- As part of the care giving cycle, we know that how a carer thinks and feels about a child’s behaviour affects their response to that behaviour (Schofield and Beek, 2016) Therefore, this final part of the meeting is a crucial part of considering the suitability of the match and the future support needs of the potential family.
- A summary report is written by the facilitator following the day which can be used to inform the Matching meeting, Panel, Introductions and Support planning. This report will also be part of the information provided to prospective adopters.

***“Feedback from prospective adopters is that they have been really useful, bringing written information to life. For example, where a housing officer has described the home environment the child had lived in, it makes more sense than reading it. It adds that extra dimension to help adopters to understand and empathise with the child and their birth family, it gives that extra lens. It also helps prospective adopters to appreciate the complexities that led to decisions made for the child by professionals. This is crucial, as they are the ones in the future that need to explain this to their child”***

Adoption social worker



## Siblings

*“We had underestimated quite how difficult it would be having two children suffering from significant loss and trauma both continually competing for attention/attachment.”* (Adoptive parent)

*“While they look out for each other they also learn and copy and act together against us. If they perceive a slight against the other the sibling comes first. They also compete for parents’ attention.”* (Adoptive parent)

Research with adopters who have adopted siblings highlighted a number of important issues. Some adopters thought that siblings were more challenging because of the different behaviours and needs of the individual children which meant it was difficult to offer all siblings the right support; this included sibling dynamics and competition and conflict between them for their parents attention. Some felt that it was physically more work to do in terms of preparing and responding to the children with a number feeling that they were not prepared well for this (Lawrence, 2017)

*“Differing needs require different approaches that don’t always work together, and we are outnumbered.”* (Adoptive parent)

*“Even though all have same family, [they] have individual responses to trauma.”* (Adoptive parent)

Therefore, it is crucial that the UtC meeting focuses on each child’s experiences and individual needs as well as their interaction with each other. The UtC meeting will also carefully consider all contact and support plans for the child.

*“Because I was the worker for all 6 children, I could see a way forward to support the others who remain looked after”* (Child social worker comment on UtC meeting)

Refer to NAS Contact and Adoption Support Good Practice Guides

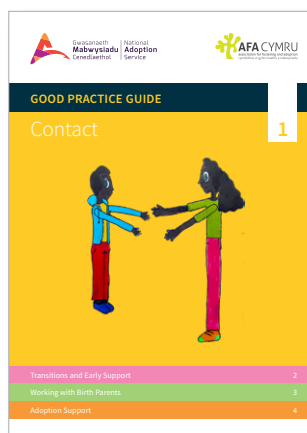
## Following the Understanding the Child Day

- Prospective adopters need to be afforded a period of reflection following the UtC meeting in order to process what they have heard. The ASW will visit the prospective adopters to fully explore their feelings about the information gained from the day. Their relationship with their ASW is critical in enabling them to be honest and realistic about any anxieties or concerns and how these can be managed.

*“We’ve had prospective adopters who’ve attended the Understanding the Child Day who have pulled out of the match because of what they’ve heard. It is better that this happens at this stage than later when a child has moved in”*

Adoption Service Manager

- The ASW and CSW (which will include the facilitator of the UtC meeting and prospective adopters social worker if different) will reflect on the learning from the day and identify strengths and vulnerabilities in the match. This will inform the Matching meeting and the Adoption Support Plan.
- The direct work plan for the child will be discussed and confirmation about when this work will start, who will be undertaking the work, and where support will come from.
- A provisional transition plan, incorporating any learning from the UtC day, is prepared by the ASW; this will be presented to Matching Panel to be considered.
- The prospective adopters will prepare introductory materials for the child, including a **Welcome to my Family** book with pictures of themselves and their home, and a DVD introducing them which will be shared with the child at the appropriate stage in the direct work plan. They should be supported in this task by the ASW with the CSW and foster carer offering advice and support to ensure that the materials reflect the personality and current preferences of the child.
- Prospective adopters can be encouraged to provide a toy to accompany their Family book and DVD and which can be used during the transitional activities. Very often this toy is used by adopters to “introduce” the child to them and their home and can be used to introduce playfulness eg Little Bear is hiding, can you find him? This is Little Bear sitting on your new bed. Can you see who’s in the photo by the side of the bed? (eg photo of foster carer and child)
- Where prospective adopters have children already, the ASW will provide support to the prospective adopters to begin preparing them for their new sibling.



## Work with the Foster carers and prospective adopters

- Opportunities for further informal contact between the foster carers and adopters should be provided in order to develop positive relationships. This should be monitored by the ASW and SSW to ensure that both parties are happy with the level and nature of the contact, and that each party is aware of the remit of their role and responsibilities within the overall plan for the child.

*“In order for the adults involved to create coherent support for the child, it is essential to have a shared language and understanding as well as opportunities to meet, reflect and share information”*

Norris, 2019

- Whilst oversight by professionals should be proportionate, this does need to take account of the fact that intervention will be needed in some cases if there are any safeguarding issues and / or one (or both) of the parties are struggling. Effective collaborative working and communication between the professionals involved is essential to ensure that any plan and agreed approach is adhered to and remains child centred.

*“Lower level concerns may be discussed and successfully mediated by the relevant social worker. However, more serious concerns may be indicators of underlying issues that need to be discussed by all the professionals involved and a plan made to address them.”*

Neil et al 2020a

- The foster carer and their SSW needs to understand the work being completed with the child and feel confident in being able to support this.

An overview of the work being done with the child will be shared with the prospective adopters (and their adoption social worker if different to ASW).

## Direct work with the child following the Understanding the Child Day

Now that the plan for adoption with the prospective adopters have been confirmed, Stage 1 of the direct work with the child can start.

**Stage 1 of the direct work plan** will usually incorporate a number of sessions with the child, including:

- Introductions, setting the scene and boundaries
- What children need/ who takes care of them/ who makes decisions about what is best for them
- Different types of families – birth family, foster family, adoptive families
- Talking to the child about finding a family for them.
- The foster carer will be part of this work and be able to provide reassurance within the sessions and afterwards. The ASW to arrange a pre session with the foster carer to explain the process and what the sessions will cover; this should include the SSW and CSW.
- The ASW / CSW will also explain the foster carers role within the sessions as an emotional support for the child, responding to “wondering aloud” by the ASW/ CSW about how the child might be feeling.
- It is important that the foster carers are prepared that the child might become more agitated during with direct work as they are given time and space to think about previous experiences and next steps; the ASW will contact the foster carer between sessions to see how the child has been. The same principles applies to the child’s school or nursery and ensuring that they are aware of the work being done with the child.
- A variety of activities and approaches can be used to communicate with the child that are built on an understanding of child development, attachment theory, developmental trauma and play. Age appropriate activity based work helps children feel more comfortable expressing feelings and helps build trust; the games, stories, songs, rituals that are used during these early sessions can be used during introductions and transitions with the adopters to give the child the sense of continuity and coherence and help them co regulate alongside their safe adults.

Adapted from SEWAS direct work guidance, Emma Decker Thomas

See **Appendix 5** for examples of books and activities that can be used during direct work with the child.



## Case work

- The proposed placement and Adoption Support Plan (which will incorporate learning from the nurture trauma timeline/UTC day) will be scrutinised in a professional's matching meeting and a final decision made about whether to proceed to Matching Panel. The support plan for the child will be updated to take into consideration the needs of 'this child' with 'this family'.
- The ASW and CSW will write an Adoption Placement Report (APR)
- The APR and proposed Adoption Support Plan (ASP) will be shared with the prospective adopter/s, allowing 10 working days for them to consider and make comment.

## Farewell Contact and Prospective adopters meeting with birth parents

- Consideration is to be given by the CSW to the timing of a Farewell Contact. Although this will not take place until after Matching panel and ADM decision, the plan for this will be considered at panel.
- Children will be prepared for their Farewell Contact as part of the direct work plan. The timing of this will be carefully considered in line with the plan.
- Consideration needs to be given at this stage to a meeting between the birth parents and prospective adopters and should be considered as usual in all cases unless there are specific reasons why it cannot occur. Although this meeting cannot happen until after a match has been formally agreed, planning for this should be given priority at this stage.

Refer to **Contact and Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guides**.

## Chemistry meeting / child viewing prior to matching

- The decision about whether a 'chemistry meeting' should happen should be made on a case by case basis. In some cases, prospective adopters might be particularly anxious about how they will connect with the child or a child might have particular behaviours that it would be useful for the prospective adopters to observe.
- If this meeting is to happen, there needs to be careful consideration about the logistics, and how the child will be prepared. This should be incorporated into the direct work plan for the child. The ASW will lead.

*"It was really helpful to get to see them before we agreed to go ahead – just to get a sense of what they were like together"*

Adoptive parent of 2 children



### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Reg 33(1) AA(W)R 2005: Function of the adoption panel in relation to the proposed placement

Reg 34(1) AA(W)R 2005 Adoption agency's decision in relation to the proposed placement

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

#### Adoption Panel

- The panel has a key role in ensuring that the child's needs have been appropriately assessed and that the proposed match is able to meet these needs. Panel also needs to ensure that any support needs for any party are appropriately addressed within the Adoption Support and Contact Plans, and that the proposed transitions plan is robust.
- Panel members need to be provided with appropriate training on transitions, and ensure they are up to date with research findings.
- The ASW will ensure that all paperwork is prepared and ready for Matching Panel. This will include: the child's CAR/B and associated paperwork; the prospective adopters PAR and associated paperwork; the Matching meeting minutes; proposed Adoption Support Plan; proposed Transitions plan. The trauma timeline and the UtC meeting report will also be included.

*"As a Panel chair, I find the report from the Understanding the Child Day hugely beneficial when we are considering matches between a child or children and adoptive parents. It also helps us identify whether we think a Support Plan should be strengthened. We find that when there has been an Understanding the Child Day, practitioners are able to speak with more confidence about the child, and this can only be good news for their ongoing support to the new family"*

Panel chair

- It is generally agreed that the prospective adopters will bring their 'Welcome to my family' book to the Matching Panel, as well as photos and a DVD about them and their home.
- The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) needs to be confident that the child's needs have been appropriately considered and will be met by the proposed match, and that the proposed transitions plan and Adoption Support plan contains the necessary support to enable to plan to proceed successfully.
- Prior to the expected approval of the match by the Agency Decision Maker, the ASW, CSW and foster carers will agree the plan for how best to share information about the new family with the child. These items will be shared with the child as part of the direct work and on a daily basis by the foster carer once the match has been ratified by the Agency Decision maker. How and when this will be done should be carefully considered on a case by case basis as part of the transitions planning.

#### Following ADM decision

- The adoption team manager for the placing authority will send a letter to the prospective adopters informing them of the match and of details pertaining to delegated Parental Responsibility.

See **Appendix 6** for Delegation of Parental Responsibility checklist for prospective adopters.

#### Work with the birth family

- Letter to be sent to birth parent setting out the expected date of placement, again urging them to seek legal advice if the intention is to make an application for leave, and a plea to inform the agency immediately if this is the intention. A short timescale should be provided (this is the second time that notice has been given). Each region and child's local authority needs to be clear about who takes on this responsibility.

See AFA advice commissioned by NAS on applications for revocation of Placement Orders.

Refer to **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**

### Direct work with the child at this stage:

- The ASW / CSW as agreed will undertake **Stage 2 of the direct work plan**. This session helps prepare the child for Farewell contact with their birth family, which will include birth parents, siblings who are not being placed with them, other significant family members, and will help the child understand why a Farewell contact is needed and what the adoption process will look like.
- The child is likely to be anxious about what might happen, and this session provides reassurance and clarity.
- It should take place a few days before Farewell contact. Again, the foster carer should be present during the session for emotional support as they will be offer ongoing reassurance to the child.

Adapted from SEWAS direct work guidance, Emma Decker Thomas

- Birth parents and other family members also need to be prepared and supported prior, during and after the Farewell Contact.

Refer to **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**

- Final contacts with family members should be undertaken in a timely way, so as to ensure that there is sufficient time for the child to begin to process these losses before introducing an adoptive family.

Refer to the **NAS Contact Good Practice Guide**.

### Work with foster carers and prospective adopters

- The ASW/CSW as agreed will undertake a support session with the foster carer/s and prospective adopter/s. This will identify the resources and activities (rhymes, songs, books, games) that have been used in the direct work with the child which will be used during the early stages of introductions ('Getting to Know You') stage and beyond. Familiar routines and favourite food will be used with the child in order to create a familiar and comforting play base that stretches the entire transitions process.
- The ASW/CSW as agreed will support the foster carer and prospective adopter to get into the child's shoes and identify potential emotional needs and responses. This approach acknowledges that this is a difficult journey for the child.



### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Reg 36(1) AA(W)R 2005: Requirements imposed on the adoption agency before the child is placed for adoption with prospective adopter

Reg 37(1) AA(W)R 2005: Reviews (when the child has not yet been placed for adoption)

*“It’s all about relationships and improving the relationships between the foster carer, the child, the social worker and the adopters. We want families to get off on the right foot”*

Clinical psychologist

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

#### Child focused transitions

Not only do children who have experienced early trauma have a compromised ability to manage their emotions, they also have a tremendous amount of difficult emotions to deal with, far more than most children, indeed far more than most people (Elliot, 2013).

Understandably, the child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions. However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move, when the child is given time and gently supported to connect to their new world in a way that feels safe whilst providing them the reassurance that they will retain the important connection with their foster carer (Neil, 2020a). When children do move from their foster carer to their adoptive family, the focus needs to switch from reducing time delays to moving at a pace that is comfortable for the child (Neil, Morciano, Young and Hartley, 2020)

### CORE PRINCIPAL

#### THREE STEP APPROACH TO INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions will follow this three-step approach, adapted from ‘Moving to Adoption’ (Neil et al, 2020), and appropriate time given for each phase needs to be addressed in the planning:

1. **Getting to know you** – activity based “observe and play sessions” (Neil et al 2020) involving the foster carer, prospective adopters and the child to provide planned opportunities to become familiar and start to build trust through play and observation prior to the adopters undertaking a care giving role
2. **Getting to show you** – where the foster carer initially takes the lead in showing the prospective adopters care tasks involved with the child and the adopters gradually start to undertake these at the child’s pace, so that both the child and prospective adopters become more confident in receiving / giving care, whilst also recognizing their conflicting and complex emotions.
3. **Ready to go** – the child and prospective adopters are more confident in receiving / giving care and becoming more familiar with the child’s likes / dislikes and how to help them regulate. Following mutual agreement at review, arrangements are made for the child to move to their new home

All three phases of introductions require careful oversight and support, this should be coordinated and overseen by the ASW, in conjunction with the adoption social worker for the prospective adopters (if different) CSW, and SSW. The key principle in this approach is the role of the foster carer and the importance of an ongoing relationship in the best interests of the child.

*“As an adult, imagine moving away from our family, job, friends, pets and possessions all in one go, and how frightening and distressing that would be. If we imagine a small child, who has experienced trauma, having to undergo such a move, again”*

Adoption social worker



## Introductions Planning or Transitions meeting

- The Introduction Planning or Transitions meeting is facilitated by the family finding team manager assisted by the ASW. The CSW, foster carer, SSW, prospective adopters (and their adoption social worker if different) should attend. Where prospective adopters live alone it may be appropriate for them to involve a close friend or family member.
- Thought should be given to timing, context, venue and how these influence the atmosphere of the meeting to prevent feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of situation – especially when the prospective adopters are meeting the child for first time afterwards.

***“We have evolved our practice over the years, we used to have the introduction planning meeting in the first day of introductions. We generally don’t do this anymore, as we have realized that adopters (quite understandably) are often unable to focus on the intricacies of planning, when they were about to meet their child for the first time!”***

Adoption social worker

- The draft transitions plan prepared earlier using the knowledge and understanding gained from the Understanding the Child Day will form the basis of this meeting and the final plan.
- There needs to be flexibility within the planning to take account of individual circumstances of people involved, including existing children in both the foster and adoptive families, geographical considerations, additional responsibilities and needs of family members.

This helps to ensure that the plan remains child focused and tailored to each child’s needs but also helps the two families understand each other’s needs and perspectives.

- The plan needs to include any direct work with the child, and with the foster carer and adopters prior to introductions starting.
- The plan will also incorporate contact arrangements during and after the child’s move. “Arrangements most likely to be successful are those which are planned and mutually agreed with adopters, and have the details and expectation set out and confirmed in writing” (Neil et al, 2018a, Neil, 2020a). Different ways of working and keeping in touch through digital technology precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic have been found to be extremely effective and beneficial and should be considered alongside traditional methods.
- Allowing time within the plan for pause and reflection should be considered to allow the adults time to process their emotions and catch their breath.

***“I think someone said you will get a day off but we didn’t get one, we got an afternoon.... I daren’t say we need a day off because they would have said you obviously aren’t prepared to take a child. You won’t get a day off when you do”***

Adopter in Lewis, 2018

- The length of introductions will vary depending on the child / children, and sufficient time needs to be given to each phase.

***“The narrative all the way along is about the adopters learning the child through the foster carers. Everyone needs to really focus on the child. This enables introductions to happen at the child’s pace, not the grown ups’ place.”***

Adoption social worker

- Consideration must be given to the sensory experiences of the nonverbal child, for whom sounds, smells and visual stimuli are essential, and need to be incorporated into planning. No matter how young a child is, even a baby, they will still have a sense of what is happening and will be feeling unsettled and insecure.
- If siblings are being placed from different foster placements, preparation needs to be done with all the children and foster carers and arrangements considered that will enable the adopters to get to know each child. The sibling relationships in these circumstances also have to be supported.

***“What worked well was allowing the children to spend as much time as possible together prior to introductions, helping them to realise they were siblings. Introductions were planned so the children were seen individually at their respective homes to begin with, as the children were unused to vying for attention together and it also gave the adopters a sense of the child as an individual, and see their routine. It is very likely that the routines for each child will differ, so it is important when combining routines to ensure that adopters are mindful that this is yet another change, it can’t always be helped, but it can be understood.”***

Adoption social worker

- The transitions plan must also take account of a child’s need to say goodbye to their school and other regular activities, depending on their age and need. Opportunities for prospective adopters to be as involved as possible in this should be sought e.g. attendance at leavers assembly, a school play or taking cakes into the class to say thank you and farewell.

- There may be future opportunities for a significant adult, such as a teacher to visit the child, once placed with their adoptive family, in order to support them in managing feelings of loss around their previous school or activities.
- Opportunities to check in and make adjustments should be built into the plan as well as a more formal review involving all parties in the second phase. There might be the need for more than one review before agreement for the child to move to the prospective adopters' home.
- Whilst there may be need for some flexibility, the ASW needs to ensure that sufficient time is given at each stage and that individual adult's emotions or agendas do not interfere with this. It is essential that any changes to the plan be agreed by the ASW.

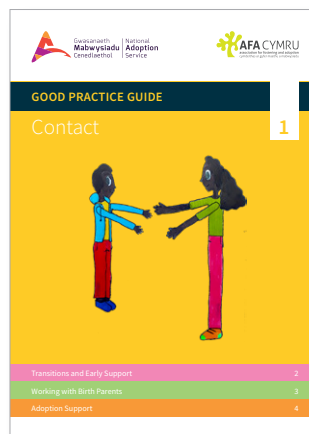
*“Foster carers and adopters are likely to have good ideas about what is needed to make the move work well, but they also feel anxious and this may lead them to over commit themselves, or appear inflexible”*

Neil et al, 2020

- Plans for contact with foster carers following the child's move will be built into the plan and be reviewed at the Introductions Review

Refer to the NAS **Contact Good Practice Guide**.

A written copy of the plan will be provided to relevant people by the ASW; this should include contact details and agreement of roles and responsibilities.



## Case work / role of professionals

- Where a child has been referred for a specialist service (eg Adopting Together) a bespoke plan for support during transitions will be agreed.
- The CSW will keep the IRO informed of the match and schedule the first adoption review following placement.
- Priority should be given to arranging to a meeting between the child's birth parents and prospective adopters.

Refer to NAS **Contact** and **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guides**

- Clarity of role and responsibilities and good communication between professionals is crucial in supporting effective transitions and in providing the right support at the right time.
- Professionals need be able to offer clear advice and support as well as listen to the foster carers and adopters and be willing and confident to adjust the plan if necessary, and also be confident enough to allow space for relationships to develop between the child and adopters without being overly intrusive. This can be a delicate balance and where effective communication and support within the professional network is essential.

## Work with the foster carer and prospective adopters

- Both the ASW and SSW must check in with the foster carer and prospective adopters that they are comfortable with the plan and are clear about their roles within this. At each stage, there needs to be acknowledgement of any anxieties and emotions, and appropriate support provided. This support from respective social workers will need to be provided in the lead up to, during and following the child's move.
- As well as understanding the principles behind the 3 stages of the transitions plan, the foster carers and adopters need to well prepared and are able to support the plan.
- The ASW / CSW as agreed will undertake a joint session with the foster carer and prospective adopters to share with materials that have been used with the child during the direct work sessions; some of the activities / books / rhymes that have been used with the child will form the transitional activities that will be used by both the foster carer and the child during introductions. These familiar activities will help the child's sense of continuity and coherence (Norris, 2019b)

*“Having virtual meetings between foster carers and adopters to prepare for sessions with children has been invaluable. It has meant people can continue to form relationships and prepare for introductions, in a way that is less intense than physical meet ups. We are not trying to cram everything into one session, it takes the pressure off”*

Adoption social worker





## Work with the child

- Once the ADM has made the decision about the match, the ASW / CSW as agreed will undertake **Stage 3 of the direct work plan** with the child.
- As with all the other stages of the plan, it is essential that the foster carers are involved in the session and are able to provide the right emotional messages to the child. This session will involve telling the child / children about their new family and will build on the previous work completed.
- If there are siblings, the information needs to be shared at the same time; individual sessions with each child afterwards can happen if needed.
- Acknowledgement should be given to the significance of this news and that each child is likely to react differently. Be prepared and be flexible!
- Inevitably, they will have a mix of complex emotions, and will need time and sensitive support to process and make sense of what is happening; some children will ask lots of questions immediately and these need to be answered to prevent them building into significant anxieties, whilst others will need some time before they are ready to hear more. Therefore, the length and content of this session will differ according to the needs of the child.
- In this session the ASW/CSW as agreed will recap on information covered with the child in previous sessions. Explore the child's feelings about moving to a new family if they are ready to do so and acknowledge that they need to be "the right family for them", a family who knows how to take care of them and knows what they like and don't like.
- The ASW/ CSW as agreed will share with the child the Family book and DVD (and any other materials) that the prospective adopters have prepared for them at this point. As the ASW/CSW goes through the materials, they can make direct links to the things that the child has identified as wanting or wondering about in previous sessions.
- Children might say they don't want to move to a new family and want to stay with their foster carers. This is completely understandable and a healthy reaction. It is necessary and helpful to acknowledge these feelings and agree that a new family will need to learn all about them from their foster carer and from them.
- Reassurance will be given to the child that they will have plenty of time to get to know the prospective adopters and that their foster carer will be with them as they do so.
- Children might also get very excited and be unable to focus. They might only want to briefly look at the photo books and/ or DVD about their new family and might need a further session prior to introductions.
- If prospective adopters have met with the birth parents, the ASW/ CSW as agreed can show the child a photo taken during the meeting thereby giving the child the message that the adopters know about their birth family. This often helps with child in feeling that the birth family has given "permission" that their new family is ok.
- If appropriate at this point, some of the messages that the birth family were able to share with the adopters can be shared with the child eg "your birth mum wanted your new mummy to know why she chose your lovely name and asked her to look after you really well because you are so special"
- Children might get cross that their birth parents have met their new family before them, and these feelings need to be acknowledged. It can be useful to remind the child that adults are taking very special care and responsibility to make sure that their new family knows about all their life.
- Following the session, the foster carers will share the Family book, DVD and any other materials with the child on a daily basis until the start of introductions.

Adapted from SEWAS direct work guidance, Emma Decker Thomas





*“Introductions are so intense, it is such a huge undertaking for adopters and foster carers to prepare a child for adoption. It requires adopters to enter the home and follow the routine of people they haven’t long met, whilst also carrying worries about whether they are bonding with the child, whether the child likes them and a multitude of other concerns. Meanwhile the foster carer is required to share their home, showing adopters (that may never have parented before) how to parent this child, whilst potentially carrying worries of their own”*

Adoption social worker



*“I think what was particularly helpful (in making a positive move) was the first meetings between the children and adopters with no pressure on adopters to do any caring tasks and for the children to develop a playful relationship first with adopters.”*

Adoption Social worker cited in Neil et al, 2018

*“Although the arrival of an adopted child in their family was a time of great joy, the introductions period was experienced as highly stressful and physically and emotionally exhausting by many parents. Good support from professionals was therefore crucial for many people in helping them cope.”*

Neil et al, 2018b

*“I didn’t imagine that we would be able to form a connection with him over a video chat, but we did! He seemed to really enjoy our calls, we learned a lot about the things he enjoyed and had fun together. I think it made it much easier for when he met us in person”*

Adoptive parent



## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Work with foster carers, prospective adopters and the child

- Any transition is painful and difficult and it is inevitable that emotions of the child’s past losses and further ones as a result of the move come to the fore. It can be painful for adults to see a child in distress, and it can seem kinder to move children along quickly, diverting their attention to exciting activities and new toys.

However, this does not address the loss and distress the child is experiencing. The ASW’s role is to help the foster carer/s and prospective adopter/s to continue to hold the child’s emotional experience in mind, and help to focus everyone’s attention upon ensuring transitions happen at the child’s pace.

- The ASW will coordinate and oversee all phases of the introduction, in conjunction with the adoption social worker for the prospective adopters (if different) CSW, and SSW.
- It is equally important for the prospective adopters to have the opportunity and support to explore how they are (really) feeling. The CSW, ASW (and adoption social worker if different) should provide an atmosphere where prospective adopters can feel able to express their quite understandable feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed by the process. The ASW and SSW will ensure support is available for the foster carers as they are also likely to be experiencing a range of complex emotions.
- The ASW will monitor how things are progressing, ensuring that the framework of the plan is being adhered to. Support will be provided, along with the other professionals, as necessary.
- If any concerns emerge, they must be discussed and addressed as they might be indicators of underlying issues.

**GETTING TO KNOW YOU** should begin slowly, with short meet ups in the familiar surroundings of the foster carers home and/or digital contact between the child, prospective adopter/s and foster carer/s, to enable the child and prospective adopters time to observe each other and gradually get to know each other through playful, non-threatening, and familiar activity and routines before the more intense phase of introductions begins.

- Each of these sessions will involve the materials and activities agreed with the ASW, and will also include the Family book / DVD and “transitional toy” that were provided by the adopters. Other activities could include short visits to the park with the foster carer; activities need to be low key ones that do not overstimulate.
- The child needs to know what will be happening next and be allowed to express any anxieties or feelings of ambivalence. The foster carer will be the child’s secure base (Schofield and Beek, 2016), and remain physically and psychologically available to the child; they will respond to any care needs and “wonder aloud” about what the child might be thinking and feeling and how that will be influencing their behaviour.
- This validates the child’s emotions and inevitable anxieties and helps them make sense of their feelings. This will also model the therapeutic approach that the adopter will need to embrace with the child.
- Both the foster carer and adopters need to understand why this approach is so important. The early sessions will build on the trusting relationships that have developed between the foster carer and adopters, and will convey these messages of trust to the child, that these new people are ok.

*“They will see that their trusted foster carer feels comfortable and confident in the presence of the adopters and so feel more comfortable and confident to “take the risk” of building trust in their new parents”*

Neil 2020a

- The use of video calls to facilitate the Getting to know you process should be considered as a way to build the relationship maintain contact between sessions that can be felt as less intense for the child, but also as a way to reassure them about certain things like their bedroom in their new home. This may be particularly helpful for some children, and can help alleviate some anxieties as well as build familiarity. As with face to face meetings, all digital sessions need to be fully supported by the foster carer and remain child focused in terms of length and activity.
- The Getting to know you phase is often rushed, thus creating missed opportunities for developing trust and confidence of the child in their prospective adopters.
- Foster carers and prospective adopters might be impatient or obliged to take on caregiving tasks earlier than planned, and indeed the child themselves might ask them to do so. Whilst there can be some flexibility, this should be resisted and the foster carer should undertake all primary caregiving. “It should be held in mind that the aim is for the child to build trust and feel comfortable with the adopters before taking the next step of trusting them to care for them” (Neil et al. 2020a)

**GETTING TO SHOW YOU** will be the starting point for learning the child’s routine, likes and dislikes and for the child to grow in confidence in the prospective adopter’s capacity to meet their needs and begin taking on the parenting role.

This phase continues in the foster carers home to begin with, with them taking the lead in caregiving; the majority of this will be direct contact with the option for virtual contact in between sessions if appropriate or needed by the child. The child is then introduced to their new home in the second phase, with the adopters taking the lead in caregiving but with the foster carer still staying close by initially.

- The child’s first visit to their new home needs to be planned on an individual basis; some children might need the reassurance of seeing their new home very soon before they build trust in the prospective adopters. The use of photographs and videos of the home will help reassure the child.
- The foster carer needs to remain physically and psychologically available; they will clearly remain as the child’s secure base whilst showing the prospective adopters what they need to do to care for the child and meet their needs. The adoptive parents observe at first, then help, and then do. Within the progression of tasks, foster carers need to “give permission” and signal to the child that they trust the adopters to do this.
- This may happen multiple times and there should be no pressure to progress quicker than feels comfortable. This allows the adoptive parents to learn about routines and maintain them during the transition period. It also helps children to feel safe with, and to build trust in the prospective adopters, who themselves will hopefully be developing confidence in their parental role. The activities that were used in the Getting to Know you phase should continue to be used to give the child a continued sense of familiarity and continuity.
- The ASW will explain to the child what is happening from the beginning. They need to know what is happening, and to see the adults in control and making sensitive and thoughtful decisions, with them in mind.
- Again, this phase relies a lot on trust, both the developing trust between the child and the prospective adopters but also between the foster carers and prospective adopters. The adults need to be confident that they are able to defer (to the foster carer) and enable (the prospective adopters) in a way that holds the child’s needs central without their actions being undermined or misinterpreted.
- The phase will be carefully monitored by the ASW to ensure that both the child is confident in accepting care from the prospective adopters and the prospective adopters are confident in giving this. When this is the case, the child will be introduced to their new home (if they haven’t already been), and activities and caregiving tasks will take place there.
- Each child will respond differently to accepting caregiving, with some taking longer than others; ensure flexibility within the plan to accommodate for this. Any significant changes to the plan should be agreed with the ASW.

- When this stage moves to the prospective adopters home, initially, the foster carer will be both physically and psychologically present but there should be a plan for their physical presence to gradually reduce whilst their psychological presence remains. For example, with photographs of the foster carer in the home and the prospective adopters talking to the child about them, the child drawing a picture for them, phone / skype calls.

*“I think the amount of time he was able to spend in the adopters house and in their company whilst I was still present to reassure him definitely made the move easier for him”*

Foster carer cited in Neil et al, 2018b

This will reassure the child that the foster carer is “holding them in mind” even though they are not with them, and the child will be reassured that they will see the foster carer soon.

*“(the child) will continue to benefit from the secure base relationship with the foster carers whilst they become familiar with their new parents and surroundings”*

Neil et al, 2020a

#### Stage 4 of the direct work with the child.

- The first session will take place in the early stages of the Getting to show you phase. It will be undertaken by the ASW/CSW as agreed and involve the child, foster carer and prospective adopter. This session brings together the work completed with the child in previous sessions and overtly shares this with the prospective adopters, giving the child and the prospective adopters a shared language and narrative about the child’s history and needs. This is important in helping a child feel safe during transitions and in establishing safe foundations for their relationship with their new parents.

*“Children often worry that their new parents don’t know everything about them and that if they did, they wouldn’t want them. This session addresses this by giving the child the opportunity to see knowledge about themselves being shared in a safe, familiar way with the clear message that the prospective adopters know all their story.”*

Adoption team manager



- The child should be encouraged to be involved in the telling of their story, maybe with some of the toys that have been used in the previous direct work sessions; some may feel vulnerable and anxious whilst others may be eager to share (and add to) their story with the adopters. There may need to be another session if the child is too anxious at this point.

- The other aim of the session is to share the Getting to know sensory and fun games that the family can take forward in building their connection and co regulation with the child. These activities will be used throughout the rest of introductions by the prospective adopters and in the early stages after the move.
- If there is an existing child in the new family, this session should run as two sessions. The first part (telling the story) will not involve the new sibling; the second session will involve the new sibling in the sensory games.
- A further direct work session will be offered towards the end of the Getting to Show you stage. Again, this will include the child, foster carers and prospective adopters and use the sensory activities. This session will acknowledge the emotions the child may be experiencing about the move to their new family and offering reassurance that their foster carers will be there to support them.

Adapted from SEWAS direct work guidance, Emma Decker Thomas

#### Potential indicators of difficulty

All of these issues will require careful assessment and analysis. Information sharing between professionals throughout introductions will be critical to ensure that issues are addressed if they emerge.

- **Lack of cooperation between foster carer/s and / or the prospective adopter/s.**

It is hoped that this will have been evident at an earlier stage and addressed, although might not emerge until the introductions period with one or both parties confiding reservations.

Research has highlighted that the way foster carers managed the introductory period could make a crucial difference to how adoptive parents experienced this process, and how they felt their child experienced the transition (Neil et al, 2018a)

Where adoptive parents reported difficulties, issues highlighted included foster carers being either negative and controlling or ambivalent about the plan; finding it hard to cope with their own feelings of loss and letting the child go; being reluctant to maintain contact after the move (Neil et al. 2018a, Neil et al, 2018b).

It is important that both the foster carers and adopters are able to give the child the right messages and are able to help children to cope with their distress, by acknowledging and containing it, rather than avoiding, or minimising it. This includes being able to support their narrative and the plan for their move to the new family and put the child’s needs above their own.

- **Prospective adopters consistently being late and / or wanting to change the plan. Foster carer’s continually changing the plan.**

If the development of the relationship between the foster carer and prospective adopters has progressed too quickly, this might lead to them overlooking the need to work with social workers; they might need gentle reminding of why the plan was formulated in the way it was and to ensure they remain within the framework.

Equally, the foster carer might be resistant to allowing the prospective adopters to learn and engage in caregiving tasks, be discriminatory, or not manage the presence of other people in their home during introductions for example neighbours, friends, extended family, cleaners or decorators.

Foster carers and prospective adopters need to be able to have private conversations with their SSW / ASW to enable them to share any concerns openly, with the overall aim of addressing them.

- **The child being highly distressed or, conversely, showing no distress at all.**

If the child appears to be taking it their stride, it does not mean that is the child is “fine” (Boswell and Cudmore, 2014) and that introductions should be shortened. Many children are unable to express their feelings and whilst they may present as taking the process in their stride, it is very unlikely this is the case.

***“If a child seems fine during and after introductions the question we should be asking ourselves is “How can that be?” as we would naturally expect the child to experience a period of grief and loss”***

Adoption Social worker



***“We said we could have probably taken her home a bit sooner but....we don’t know what she would have been like if we had done that”***

Adoptive parent



- **The child responds better to one prospective adopter and is rejecting to the other** (where adopters are in a couple). One of the prospective adopters is not engaging with the child and / or seeming far less keen than their partner in engaging with the child (where adopters are in a couple).

**If the prospective adopters are expressing uncertainty, misgivings and doubt** during introductions, it might be better to slow down the process, rather than continue at the same pace. Even though this may be deeply upsetting for all concerned, careful management at this stage could avoid a disruption in the future, a situation which is much harder to untangle and will have a much more long-lasting impact on the child.

## Review

- During introductions there will be at least one review, with others built in if needed. This review will be led by the ASW’s team manager or senior practitioner and be attended by the ASW, CSW, prospective adopters social worker if different, prospective adopters, foster carers and their SSW. The venue should be either the foster carer’s or prospective adopter’s home / accommodation.
- The CSW has a role in ensuring that they remain confident that this is the right match for the child. They have overall responsibility for the plan for permanency but will defer to the ASW in the detail of the transitions work.

- The review will draw together all perspectives (including the child, if appropriate) about how introductions have been going and how the child is responding. The decision about whether to move to the next stage Ready to go will be dependent on key indicators of the child’s developing trust in the prospective adopters.
  - The child should be indicating that they feel confident in the adopters undertaking caring tasks for them, and appear relaxed and confident in their new home.
  - The adopters need to feel confident in providing the care to the child and in supporting their narrative; however, reassurance should always be given that the foster carer and ASW will be available to check things out and talk through.
- The Getting to know you stage might need to be extended, depending on the child’s needs.
- The child needs to know what is happening and be supported to express how they are feeling about the plan. They need to be reassured that being “Ready to go” does not mean letting go of their past and their important current relationships.

## Contact with the foster carer post adoptive placement

- Within the next stage of the plan, arrangements for contact with the foster carer after the child’s move to the new home will be built in, including direct and telephone / virtual contact, as well as arrangements that support the ongoing relationship with the foster carer. These arrangements will be made on the assumption that the child moving to their new home will not be the ending of their relationship with the foster carer, but a continuation of the child’s building of trust in their new parents. (Neil et al, 2020)
- Traditionally, previous practice was that a child required up to a number of months to ‘settle’ into their new family before having any contact with their previous foster carers. However, given our current understanding, and insight into the potentially traumatising impact of effectively ‘losing’ their main caregivers, and of being left with a sense that they have been rejected or abandoned by them, it is now recommended that the child has contact with his/her foster carers soon after they are placed with their adoptive parents, and that this is planned for prior to the move (Neil et al., 2018a).

***“These two little boys thought they were only with this new mummy and daddy because their foster carer had gone into hospital with a bad back. They were treading water, unable to form any kind of attachment, waiting to return to their foster carer”***

Adoption social worker



### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The child's placement commences upon the day that they properly 'move in'. If there are (unusually) overnight stays during the introductions, these do not count.

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

*"Knowing that they were going to WhatsApp that evening really helped. He felt reassured and so did we"*

Foster carer



The process of helping a child move from their foster home to an adoptive home can be stressful and difficult for children, foster carers and adoptive parents (Boswell & Cudmore, 2014, Lewis, 2018). It is inevitable that there will be lots of competing and conflicting emotions, and professionals involved need to work hard to ensure that the child's needs remain central. Loss and adjustments for the adults should be acknowledged and properly supported.

*"She was a stranger in our house....you think she is absolutely fine, but I remember the first night, we had no idea what we were doing"*

Adoptive parent



Transitions may be easier if there is greater temporal and relational overlap between the foster carer and adoptive family systems. This can be achieved by the adopters and foster carers working together and at the child's pace, and foster carers providing early support to the child and adopters after the move (Neil, Beek & Schofield, 2018; Bowell and Cudmore, 2017; Lewis, 2018)

The primary aim at this stage will be to enable the child and their new parents to continue the development of their relationship, with the child experiencing the comforting repetition of their care needs being met alongside empathic responses to their loss. There will be a shift in the foster carer role within this from primary caregiver to supporter, giving clear messages of endorsement to the child.

*"Having a transitions worker to help us all make sense of my sons feelings made a huge difference. On the day he moved to live with us, he was really distressed. Fortunately, we were prepared for this and felt able to help him make sense of his emotions"*

Adoptive parent



## Ready to go

- By this stage, the prospective adopters will be increasingly growing in confidence in providing care to the child, strategies to soothe the child and regulate emotions, and be familiar with the child's likes, dislikes and routine; however, they are still learning and continue to need sensitive support and guidance. This will be provided by the ASW (and the adopter's social worker if different)

***"This way of creating a family is so strange for all of us. There is such a lot of loss and anxiety. Being held through the process helps us as adopters, helps the foster carers and, most importantly, helps the children"***

Adoptive parent



- Similarly with the child, there will be clear indicators of their growing trust in the adopters and their confidence in them to keep them safe and meet their needs but they will also still be learning and will need support. This will primarily be provided by the adopters with support and guidance from the ASW, foster carer, CSW.
- The activities that have been used across the transitions period will be used by the prospective adopters to support the child and provide a sense of continuity and reassurance.
- All efforts will have been made to provide continuity of environment, in order to provide similar sensory experiences for the child in the adoptive placement, including bedding, clothing, washing powder, favourite food etc. However, there will be lots of differences and it is important that these are openly acknowledged with the child, accompanied by "wondering aloud" about what the child might be feeling.

***"Good practice at this stage involves a sensitive attunement to the changes that have occurred for the child, some continuity of environment where possible, and a spirit of enjoying and looking forward"***

Neil et al, 2020a

- Prospective adopters will acquire some Parental Responsibility for the child as soon as the child is placed with them, to be shared with the birth parents and the adoption agency making the placement.

See **Appendix 6** for Delegated Parental Responsibility checklist

## Stage 5 of the direct work with the child

- This stage comprises up to 3 sessions, with the first approximately 3 weeks after the child's move to their new family. This work will be done by the ASW / CSW as agreed.
- The session provides the opportunity to remind the child of the narrative from previous sessions, and to carry this understanding into their new home and family, as well as an opportunity for the child to change or add to their play story. It also provides the family a structured space to continue to learn to use the sensory games and activities that have been used to help regulate the child.
- Depending on the child / children, there might need to be more than one session. The overall aim is to continue to encourage the child and give them permission that it is okay to share their history with their new parents, and to support the building of attachments through shared play.
- The child needs to be prepared for the ending of the work; this should acknowledge the sense of sadness but also celebrate the new role of the parents in being the child's support. The final session will be used to transfer any items that have been created in the sessions, with the reassurance that the adopters will keep them safe for the child.

Adapted from SEWAS direct work guidance, Emma Decker Thomas





### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Reg 37(2) AA(W)R 2005: reviews where a child is placed for adoption.

Paras 13.11 – 13.13 Welsh Government's Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide: Reviewing and monitoring of a child or young person's Part 6 care and support plan:

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

#### Support for families

Advice around the time of placement needs to be supportive and holistic, taking into consideration the life experiences of the child and the lifestyle of the prospective family, whilst keeping the child's needs central.

It is essential that practitioners appreciate the huge level of adjustment for the child and the adoptive family. Meakings et al. (2016) found that prospective adopters were frequently being told to "batten down the hatches and see no one for at least two weeks" once the child is placed. Whilst this may appear sound advice, providing this degree of prescription was found to be counterproductive, inducing additional stress and pressure on families, in some cases this led to lasting difficulties.

Isolation following adoption was a specific concern identified by Adoption UK where advice given to keep friends and families at a distance in the early days. Whilst this advice was given with the best intentions, this can isolate adopters and exclude supporters, and could lead to a risk of long-term erosion of support networks (AUK, 2019).

This can be better addressed with the provision of a workshop for family and friends that shares the principles of developmental trauma, the parenting approach needed for children who have experienced early trauma, and how they can best support their families and friends in a way that does not disrupt early attachments and settling in. This will be the responsibility of the adoption service to facilitate.

#### Case work

- There needs to be effective communication between the professionals involved and a clear understanding of roles and responsibility. Not only is this essential as far as safeguarding is concerned, it also ensures that any advice and support is consistent.

- Statutory visits will be undertaken by the CSW. These visits are important, not only to assess safeguarding and the well-being of the child, but to support the child in settling.

Refer to the NAS **Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide**.

The visits will also provide opportunities to discuss parenting issues with the prospective adopters and answer questions they may have. These visits must not be rushed, as they are vital to supporting the placement.

- The CSW will take the lead from the ASW in supporting the prospective adopters to parent the child they are only just getting to know in a reparative way. All these approaches will be from a trauma informed perspective.

#### Work with the prospective adopters

- The ASW, in conjunction with the adopter's adoption social worker if different, will provide direct support sessions with the prospective adopters which will offer opportunities for them to reflect on the real experience of parenting their child and provide a safe and supportive space to express feelings.
- The first session will occur within the first month of placement and following sessions will be planned according to need/ support plan.
- These sessions will recognise the prospective adopters growing confidence, strengths and achievements as parents and any new or developing support needs.
- Sessions will focus on understanding the child's behaviours and development of reparative parenting with support and guidance in parenting strategies and techniques.
- The ASW will encourage ongoing use of the activities and materials that were used in throughout introductions, with the emphasis on low key family activities, games and routines. These can help the child link back to their parenting role and what they do to keep them safe.
- Prospective adopters need to be able to be honest about how they are feeling or struggling with without the anxiety of feeling they were failing of that the child will be removed. Challenges such as difficulties in bonding and unrealistic expectations of family life can be a test to mental health (Moyer and Goldberg, 2017).
- Although messages about holidays and introducing too many people too soon to the child will have been covered much earlier with the prospective adopters, it useful to reiterate these messages and the reasons behind them.



Allowing the child to settle after their move takes time. Lots of new experiences and overstimulation is likely to cause distress or dysregulation and be overwhelming for them. Some children might experience sensory and emotional overload, and this will be seen in their behaviour.

- This is important when we consider the timing for introduction to a new school or nursery. Even though foster carers might have described a child as very sociable and needing lots of stimulation, the most important thing for them is to start to develop a secure attachment with their new parents.
- The child needs their adoptive family more than they need others; the strength and security within this relationship will enable them to build relationships with others. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to allow this relationship to root and develop without the external distraction of school or nursery. Decision making will be individual to each child.
- Support phone calls and visits to the prospective adopters and child will be undertaken by the ASW depending on the individual needs of the family.

Many prospective adopters require daily phone calls in the first week to ten days, enabling them to discuss and explore issues that have arisen for them and the child in a timely way.

Some might say that they don't need a high level of support for fear of being seen not to be coping when regular / frequent touch base calls can avoid this. The relationship that the ASW has with the family is critical and practitioners need to be able to gauge what is needed ; they need to be proactive and be prepared to say that they will call every day or every other day even if adopters are saying they don't need it.

Weekly visits for the first month are recommended, as the child settles in, these will usually reduce to fortnightly and then monthly support visits as the child and prospective adopters grow in confidence and begin to feel settled.

- Statutory Adoption reviews will be facilitated by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). These will take place in the prospective adopter/s home; CSW, ASW will attend as well as any other professionals involved with the child, eg. health and education.
- Prospective adopters will be supported in writing a settling in letter to the child's birth parents.

Refer to the NAS **Working with Birth Parents** and **Contact Good Practice Guides**

### Direct work with the child

- Depending on the needs of the child, further direct work sessions might be required to refresh the narrative and to support and strengthen bonds and attachment,.
- Where a child has been referred for support from therapeutic services, a bespoke plan for support will be agreed between the childcare team, adoption team and the therapist / psychologist. This will have involved the prospective adopters, foster carer/s and any other adults as appropriate.

### Contact with foster carers

- When contact with foster carers is planned, consideration should be given to a range of options in doing so. The ASW will liaise with the SSW as appropriate.

***"My biggest tip would be to build a relationship with the foster family and don't be afraid of them – they can give you so much information and insight into your child, and keeping a good relationship will make a massive difference to your child's feeling of continuation and stability"***

Adoptive parent

***"Our child's foster carer was a lifeline, a walking guidebook"***

Adoptive parent



- The role of the foster carer gradually changes as the child's trust in their new parents gradually develops and their visits will have a different purpose and value to the child.

It is important that the child knows that the foster carer continues to hold them in mind and give messages that they were loved and valued. The foster carer is also an important link for the child to their past, and a source of information for them about what happened and their birth family.

- For some children, visits from the foster carer can trigger some difficult emotions. It is difficult for adults to see a child in distress and the instinct is to protect them from this. However, prospective adopters need sensitive support from the ASW to enable them to tune into the child's needs, and to enable them see this as a valuable opportunity for bonding.
- Communicative openness, and a willingness and ability to talk warmly about a child's birth family and their foster carers gives the child the clear message that every part of them is accepted. The ongoing process of wondering aloud about the child's thinking and feelings that trigger behaviours can help the child make sense of their feelings and provide reassurance.
- This is also applicable to visits from the CSW, as well as ongoing contact (indirect or direct) with birth family.
- Consistent early messages and effective, timely support are often sufficient in supporting ongoing contact with the foster carer that is beneficial to the child. However, there might be some circumstances when this contact becomes unmanageable and it may be necessary to end the visiting.
- Although this is unfortunate, the important thing is to support the child to understand why visits from the foster carers had ended/ were coming to an end. This should ideally be done by the foster carers and adopters together and the child should be reassured that the foster carers will continue to think about them. (Neil et al, 2020).

# Decision to apply for an Adoption Order

2.11

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Adopters can make an application to the court 10 weeks after the child is placed.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Case work /support for families

- Contact with foster carers and the prospective adopters will continue to be supported and encouraged by the CSW and ASW, in the best interests of the child.

Refer to NAS **Contact Good Practice Guide**

- The CSW will continue statutory visits in line with regulatory requirements and according to the needs of the child.
- The ASW will maintain support visits / phone calls.

Refer to the NAS **Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**.

# Adoption Order Proceedings

2.12

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Annex A (The Family Procedure Rules) 2019 is the report made to the court where there has been an application for an Adoption Order. It will contain information that has been learned from the transitions period about the support needs of the child and family.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Case work /support for families

- Contact with foster carers and the prospective adopters will continue to be supported and encouraged by the CSW and ASW, in the best interests of the child.
- The CSW will continue statutory visits in line with regulatory requirements and according to the needs of the child.
- The ASW will maintain support visits / phone calls as appropriate.

Refer to the NAS **Contact and Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**.

# Post Adoption Order

2.13

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

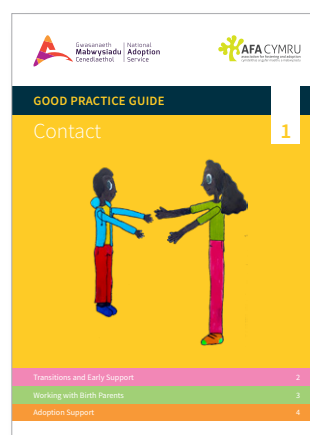
### Support for families

Although adoption can offer children stable and secure family life and the chance of developmental recovery, many children adopted from care will need ongoing support in a range of areas including children's mental and physical health and educational needs, and birth family contact and identity issues (Neil et al, 2015; Selwyn et al, 2015).

An acceptance that adoptive families may need ongoing support is now embedded in government policy and in practice, although the accessibility, appropriateness, availability and effectiveness of support services have all been called into question (Neil, Young and Hartley, 2018; Adoption UK 2019; Meakings et al 2018).

- When an Adoption Order is granted, parental responsibility passes completely to the adoptive parents, and is no longer shared.
- The placing adoption region will offer adoptive parents ongoing support from a named ASW for the first-year post Adoption Order and thereafter as needed.
- Following three years post Adoption Order, as per regulations, the responsibility for providing support will rest with the local authority in which the adoptive parents reside.
- Access to TESSA is available to families after the first year of placement, where need is low to moderate. Referrals can be made by the adoptive family or via the ASW, with the adoptive parents' consent.

See the NAS Adoption Support Good Practice Guide.



# Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks go to the following people and organisations who have been instrumental in drafting these guides.

- Our reference group, which comprised of representatives from all the adoption regions and the voluntary adoption agencies and CAFCASS Cymru.
- The members of the NAS policy and practice group
- The regional adoption team managers and childcare team managers that were also giving of their time and expertise
- AUK Cymru, in providing detailed feedback and suggestions
- The responders to the questionnaires: birth families, adoptive families, foster carers and young people with experience of adoption

This guide would not have been possible without the generosity and enthusiasm of academics and practitioners, in particular Professor Beth Neil for sharing their 'Moving to adoption' (University of East Anglia), Dr Vivien Norris for sharing the 'By your Side' model (The Family Place), the Adopting Together service, and individuals within the regions and VAAs for sharing such wonderful and inspiring examples of good practice across Wales.

## REGIONAL COLLABORATIVES



### North Wales

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham



### Mid & West Wales

Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire



### South East Wales

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Newport



### Western Bay

Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend



### Vale, Valleys & Cardiff

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan

## ALL WALES VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCIES SERVICES



# References

- Adoption UK (2019) *The Adoption Barometer*, Banbury, Adoption UK.
- Arleta, J. (2012) [Brothers and sisters in adoption: helping children navigate relationships when new kids join the family](#), London, Jessica Kingsley.
- Boswell, S. and Cudmore, L. (2014) *The Children were Fine*, in Adoption and Fostering, 2014.
- Boswell, S. and Cudmore, L. (2017) Understanding the 'blind spot' when children move from foster care into adoption, *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 43:2, 243-257.
- Cairns K (2002) *Attachment, Trauma and Resilience: Therapeutic caring for children*, London, BAAF.
- The Care Inquiry 2013, *Making not breaking, building relationships for our most vulnerable children*, The Nuffield Foundation [Accessed online] <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Care%20Inquiry%20-%20Full%20Report%20April%202013.pdf>
- Fahlberg, V. (1994) *A Child's Journey Through Placement*, London, BAAF.
- Geiger J, Hayes M and Lietz C (2013) 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? A mixed methods study examining the factors influencing foster parents' decision to continue or discontinue providing foster care' *Children and Youth Services Review* 35 (9) 1356-1365
- Jernberg, A. and Booth, P. (1999) *Theraplay: Helping parents and children build better relationships through attachment based play* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publications.
- Lanyado, M. (2003) The Emotional Experience of Moving to Adoption: Transitions, Attachment, Separation and Loss, *Journal of Clinical Psychology and Psychiatry*, London, Sage Publications.
- Lawrence, H. (2017) [Think Siblings: findings from a national survey of adopters](#), London, Coram.
- Lewis, L. (2018) [Meeting my child for the first time: adoptive parents' experiences of the period of adoption transition](#), Adoption and Fostering, 42(1), 2018, pp.38-48.
- Meakings, S., Coffey, A.J. and Shelton, K.H. (2016). A study examining the concerns, support needs and experiences of newly formed adoptive families. *Journal of Health Visiting*, 4(11), 2-9.
- Meakings, S., Ottaway, H., Coffey, A., Palmer, C., Doughty, J., Shelton, K., [The support needs and experiences of newly formed adoptive families: findings from the Wales Adoption Study](#), Adoption and Fostering, 42(1), 2018, pp.58-75, Sage.
- Moyer, A. and Goldberg, A. (2017) 'We were not planning on this, but...': Adoptive parents reactions and adaptations to unmet expectations, *Child and Family Social Work*, 22, pp.12-21.
- Neil, E., Beek, M. and Schofield, G. (2018a) *Moving to Adoption: a practice development project: Research Briefing*, Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia.
- Neil, E. & Beek, M. (2020a) *Respecting children's relationships and identities in adoption*. In G. Wrobel, E. Helder & E. Marr (Eds) *Routledge Handbook of Adoption*, London: Routledge.
- Neil, E., Morciano, M., Young, J. and Hartley, L. (2020b) *Exploring links between early adversities and later outcomes for children adopted from care: Implications for planning post adoption support*, Developmental Child Welfare age Publications.
- Neil, E., Young, J. and Hartley, L. (2018b) *The Joys and Challenges of Adoptive Family Life: A Survey of Adoptive Parents in Yorkshire and Humberside Region*, Norwich, Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia.
- Norris, V. (2019a) *By Your Side, Foster Care and Adopter Guide: Support for children moving to families*, The Family Place, Hereford
- Norris, V in Archer, C; Drury, C; Hills, J (eds) (2015) 'Not again Little Owl, Transitions from Foster Care to Adoption' in *Healing the Hidden Hurts: Transforming Attachment and Trauma Theory into Effective Practice with families, Children, and Adults*, London, Jessica Kingsley.
- Norris, V. (2019b) *Practitioner Guide: Support for children moving to families*, The Family Place, Hereford.
- Paine, A., Perra, O., Anthony, R., & Shelton, K. (2020). Charting the trajectories of adopted children's emotional and behavioral problems: The impact of early adversity and post adoptive parental warmth.
- Romaine, M., Turley, T., Tuckey, N., (2007) [Preparing children for permanence: a guide to undertaking direct work for social workers, foster carers and adoptive parents](#), London, BAAF.
- Rose and Philpot (2005) *The Child's Own Story; Life Story Work with Traumatized Children*, Jessica Kingsley, London.
- Schofield, Gillian and Beek, Mary (2006) *Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption*, BAAF, London.
- Schofield, Gillian and Beek, Mary, (2016) *Secure Base Model*, University of East Anglia, <https://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/the-secure-base-model>
- Selwyn, J., Wijedasa, D. and Meakings, S. (2015) *Beyond the Adoption Order*, London, CoramBAAF.
- Selwyn, J., Wijedasa, D and Meakings, S. (2014) [Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption: research report](#), University of Bristol. Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies. London, Department for Education.
- Quinton, D. (2012) *Rethinking matching in adoptions from care*, BAAF Publications, London.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2005). Developmental Trauma Disorder: Toward a Rational Diagnosis for Children with Complex Trauma Histories. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, 401-408.
- Wijedasa, D, and Selwyn, J. (2014) [Beyond the Adoption Order: an investigation of adoption disruption in Wales: research report](#), Bristol, University of Bristol. Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies

# Appendix 1

## Sibling Alliance Call and Pledge

### OUR CALL

**“All care experienced children and young people have a right to have a relationship with their siblings.”**

### WHO ARE WE?

We are an alliance of organisations who are passionate about the rights of care experienced and adopted children and young people.

- Voices From Care Cymru
- Children in Wales
- National Adoption Service
- Adoption UK
- Fostering Network
- AfA Cymru
- Cardiff University

Care experienced young people have repeatedly told us of their frustrations with the lack of contact with their siblings in fostering and adoption when they have been separated. When consulting with children and young people about their health and well-being, what we found was that fundamentally relationships matter and play a significant role in the everyday well-being of children and young people in care. Spending time with brothers and sisters featured heavily in conversations we were having about well-being, happiness, healthy relationships, rights and transition to independence. Equally, many young people tell us the nature of contact with their siblings is not conducive to modern life, especially with the benefits of technology and social media. We have therefore developed the pledge below and are asking all professionals working within Children's Services and/or with children across Wales to sign up.

### OUR PLEDGE

#### The pledge to children in care and their brothers and sisters

We call on all public sector and voluntary sector organisations who work with care experienced children and young people to agree the following.

To commit to using all available resources and optimise the use of technology to:

- 1. Provide information to children about their siblings**  
Clear, current information about the existence of siblings will be given to all children and young people at every stage of their journey.
- 2. Record all sibling relationships**  
All children's sibling relationships will be clearly recorded in all social care records and plans.
- 3. Implement lifelong sibling relationship assessments**  
“Together and Apart” assessments will be improved by ensuring assessments are written and reviewed as lifelong sibling relationships assessments.
- 4. Record children's views**  
Children's views on sibling contact will be transparently recorded as part of any early intervention or public law Children Act 1989 or Adoption and Children Act 2002 proceedings and statutory reviews.
- 5. Plan for continuing and meaningful sibling relationships**  
Whatever the legal framework, individual, flexible and resourced plans for continuing relationships into adulthood will be followed, when this is safe to do so.
- 6. Review the language of 'contact'**  
Words matter. Young people frequently tell us how the language of care is professionalised, cold and stigmatising. Meeting with siblings should therefore be referred to as 'keeping in touch' opportunities.

---

*Defn: Sibling includes full sibling, half sibling, step sibling by virtue of marriage or civil partnership, sibling by virtue of adoption, and any other person the child regards as their sibling and with whom they have an established family life [c. Article 8, ECHR].*

# Appendix 2

## Who this guide is intended for, abbreviations and terminology

### WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

The guide is intended for use by all professionals involved with adoption and adoption support. These include:

- 1) The child's social worker (CSW). The child's social worker is the practitioner who, as an agent of the local authority, holds overriding parental responsibility for the child, through an interim Care Order under s38 and Care Order under s31 Children Act 1989 and, if a Placement Order is granted, under s 21 ACA 2002, until such time as an Adoption Order is made. The child's social worker is responsible for care planning for adoption and for the decisions in relation to family finding and matching with prospective adoptive parents. Their role cannot be underestimated and the guide is designed to assist the child's social worker, regardless of their experience in adoption work, to ensure that they meet their statutory, regulatory and good practice duties in relation to the child for whom they have responsibility.
- 2) The regional adoption social worker (ASW). Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements (Wales) Directions 2015 each local authority in Wales places the responsibility for assessing and approving prospective adopters, family finding, matching, introductions and placement, and adoption support to adoptive families and birth families, to one of the five regional collaboratives: SEWAS, VVC, Western Bay, Mid and West Wales and NWAS. The guides are constructed to help the regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies in the sharing and development of good practice across the country. It also aims to help the adoption social worker and child's social worker be clear on their areas of responsibility and where they need to work together. The 'ASW' refers to the relevant social worker undertaking a particular piece of work (assessment / family finding / adoption support)
- 3) The voluntary adoption agency social worker. Where the prospective adopter has been assessed and approved by one of the two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales, St David's Children's Society and Barnardo's Cymru, then there is an additional component, in that the VAA social worker works with both regional adoption social worker and the child's social worker.
- 4) The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO has a critical role to play in the care planning and reviewing for a child whose care plan is for adoption. The guides refer to the functions of the reviewing process throughout, in order that all those involved with a child's progress to permanency can utilise the reviewing framework for maximum efficacy.
- 5) The Children's Guardian. The role of the Guardian in care, placement and, sometimes, adoption proceedings, provides an important independent element to the process of planning for a child's permanency through adoption. The guides will provide useful clarity and detail to Guardians on the practice expected and developing across Wales.
- 6) Members of adoption panels. Quality assurance of the contact plan as part of the matching process
- 7) Adoption Support Agencies

### TERMINOLOGY

There are few fields more sensitive than that of adoption where terminology – who is called what – is concerned. It is important, for the sake of legal clarity as well as a respect for the individuals concerned, that the same terminology is used throughout the guides.

- 1) Prospective adoptive parents remain 'prospective adoptive parent(s)' through the assessment process, approval and placement of the child, right through until the Adoption Order is made, where they become 'adoptive parent(s)'
- 2) The child's parent(s), that is biological parents, remain 'parents', as they retain their parental status until the Adoption Order is made, whereupon they are termed 'birth parents' to distinguish them from the adoptive parents, who now have full parental responsibility. However, for the purpose of the guides, biological parents are referred to as birth parents.
- 3) Child's social worker not child care social worker
- 4) Adoption Social worker, referred to in guide as ASW. We have not made further role distinction in this term ie family finding social worker, adoption support social worker. However, in the case of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, the terminology AASW is used to differentiate, and denotes the Adoption Agencies Social worker (assessment and support)



# Appendix 3

## Full legal references to legislation and regulations cited in the guide

### 2.5 MATCHING PLANNING

#### PART 5 DUTIES OF ADOPTION AGENCY IN RESPECT OF PROPOSED PLACEMENT OF CHILD WITH PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER

##### Proposed placement

32.—(1) Where the adoption agency is considering placing a child for adoption with a particular prospective adopter (in this regulation referred to as “the proposed placement”) the agency must —

- (a) provide the prospective adopter with a report about the child which must include the information set out in Schedule 5 and any other information which the agency considers relevant;
- (b) meet with the prospective adopter to discuss the proposed placement;
- (c) ascertain the views of the prospective adopter about —
  - (i) the proposed placement;
  - (ii) the child’s assessed needs for adoption support services and the adoption support plan;
  - (iii) the arrangements the agency proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child; and where applicable, any restriction in the exercise of their parental responsibility.
- (d) provide a counselling service for, and any further information to, the prospective adopter as may be required.
- (2) Where the procedures set out in paragraph (1) have been followed and the prospective adopter has confirmed to the agency in writing their agreement to the proposed placement, the agency must, in such cases as it considers appropriate and so far as is reasonably practicable in the light of the child’s age and understanding, counsel the child and tell the child about the prospective adopters, their family circumstances and home environment and ascertain the child’s views about the proposed placement, contact arrangements and any restriction of the prospective adopter’s parental responsibility.

- (3) Where the adoption agency considers that the proposed placement should proceed the agency must —
  - (a) where the agency is a local authority, carry out an assessment of the needs of the child and the prospective adoptive family for adoption support services in accordance with regulations made under section 4(6) of the Act;
  - (b) consider the arrangements for allowing any person contact with the child;
  - (c) consider whether the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or of prospective adopters, is to be restricted to any extent;
  - (d) prepare a written report which must include —
    - (i) the agency’s reasons for proposing the placement;
    - (ii) the information obtained by virtue of paragraphs (1) and (2);
    - (iii) where the agency is a local authority, its proposals for the provision of adoption support services, if any, in accordance with regulations made under section 4(6) of the Act;
    - (iv) the arrangements the agency propose to make for allowing any person contact with the child;
    - (v) the agency’s proposals for restricting the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or prospective adopter; and
    - (vi) any other information relevant to the proposed placement.
- (4) The adoption agency must notify the prospective adopter that the proposed placement is to be referred to the adoption panel and send the prospective adopter a copy of the agency’s report referred to in paragraph (3) and invite any observations on the report to be sent in writing to the agency within 10 working days, beginning with the date on which the notification was sent.

- 5) At the end of the period of 10 working days referred to in paragraph (4) (or earlier if observations are received before the 10 working days have expired) the adoption agency must send —
  - (a) the report referred to in paragraph (3);
  - (b) the report referred to in regulation 17;
  - (c) the report referred to in regulation 26 and any observations made by the prospective adopter on that report;
  - (d) any other relevant information obtained by the agency under this regulation to the adoption panel.
- 6) The adoption agency may only refer to the adoption panel its proposal to place a child for adoption with a particular prospective adopter if any other adoption agency which has made a decision in accordance with these Regulations that the child should be placed for adoption, or that the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child, has been consulted about the proposed placement.
- 7) Where the adoption agency proposes to place a child for adoption with a particular prospective adopter the agency must set up case records in any case where it has not already set up such records and place on the appropriate record any information, report, recommendation or decision referred to it by another adoption agency together with any other information to be sent to the adoption panel by virtue of this regulation in respect of them.
- 8) The adoption agency must obtain so far as is reasonably practicable any other relevant information which may be requested by the adoption panel in connection with the proposed placement and send that information to the panel.



## 2.6 MATCHING PANEL

### Function of the adoption panel in relation to the proposed placement

- 33.—(1) The adoption panel must consider the proposed placement referred to it by the adoption agency and make a recommendation to the agency as to whether the child should be placed for adoption with that particular prospective adopter.
- 2) In considering what recommendation to make the adoption panel must have regard to the duties imposed on the adoption agency under section 1(2), (4) and (5) of the Act (considerations applying to the exercise of powers in relation to the adoption of a child) and —
    - (a) must consider and take into account all information and the reports passed to it in accordance with regulation 32;

### Adoption agency's decision in relation to the proposed placement

- 34.—(1) The adoption agency must —
- (a) take into account the recommendation of the adoption panel;
  - (b) take into account any advice given by the adoption panel in accordance with regulation 33(3); and
  - (c) have regard to the consideration set out in section 1(2) of the Act, in coming to a decision about whether the child should be placed for adoption with the particular prospective adopter.
  - 2) No member of the adoption panel is to take part in any decision made by the adoption agency under paragraph (1).
  - 3) As soon as possible after making its decision the adoption agency must notify the prospective adopter in writing of its decision about the proposed placement, contact arrangements and the restriction of any person's parental responsibility.
  - 4) As soon as possible after making its decision, the agency must notify in writing —
    - (a) the parent or guardian, if their whereabouts are known to the agency; and
    - (b) where regulation 14(2) applies, the father of the child, of its decision.
  - 5) Where the adoption agency decides the proposed placement should proceed the agency must, in an appropriate manner and in the light of the child's age and understanding, explain its decision to the child.

## 2.7 INTRODUCTIONS PLANNING

### PART 6

#### Requirements imposed on the adoption agency before the child is placed for adoption with prospective adopter

36.—(1) This paragraph applies where the adoption agency —

- (a) has decided in accordance with regulation 34 to place a child for adoption with a particular prospective adopter; and
  - (b) has met with the prospective adopter to consider the arrangements it proposes to make for placing the child with him.
- 2) Where paragraph (1) applies, the adoption agency must, at least 7 days before the child is placed with the prospective adopter, provide the prospective adopter with a placement plan in respect of the child which covers the matters specified in Schedule 6 (“the placement plan”).
- 3) Where paragraph (1) applies and the child already lives with the prospective adopter, the adoption agency must provide the prospective adopter with the placement plan in respect of the child within 7 days of its decision to place the child for adoption with the prospective adopter.
- 4) Where paragraph (1) applies, the adoption agency must, before the child is placed for adoption with the prospective adopter—
- (a) notify the prospective adopter’s general practitioner in writing of the proposed placement and send with that notification a written report of the child’s health history and current state of health;
  - (b) notify the local authority (if that authority is not the adoption agency) and Local Health Board or Primary Care Trust (England) in whose area the prospective adopter resides in writing of the proposed placement;
  - (c) notify the local education authority in whose area the prospective adopter resides in writing of the proposed placement and information about the child’s educational history and whether the child has been or is likely to be assessed for special educational needs under the Education Act 1996.
- 5) The adoption agency must notify the prospective adopter in writing of any change to the placement plan.
- 6) Where paragraph (1) applies the adoption agency must, before the child is placed for adoption with the prospective adopter, arrange for the prospective adopter to meet the child and following that meeting counsel the prospective adopter and, so far as is reasonably practicable in the light of the child’s age and understanding, the child about the prospective placement.

- 7) Where, following the procedures referred to in paragraph (6) the prospective adopter confirms in writing their wish to proceed with the placement and the agency is authorised to place the child for adoption or the child is less than 6 weeks old, the adoption agency may place the child for adoption with the prospective adopter.
- 8) Where the child already lives with the prospective adopter, the adoption agency must notify the prospective adopter in writing of the date on which the child is placed there for adoption by the agency.

### Reviews

37.—(1) This paragraph applies where the adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption but the child has not been placed for adoption.

- 3) Where paragraph (1) applies, the adoption agency must carry out a review of the child’s case —
- (a) not more than three months after the date on which the agency first has authority to place; and
  - (b) thereafter not more than six months after the date of the previous review (“six months review”), until the child is placed for adoption.

## 2.10 EARLY WEEKS AND MONTHS

37(2) This paragraph applies where a child is placed for adoption.

- 4) Where paragraph (2) applies, the adoption agency must carry out a review of the
- (a) not more than four weeks after the date on which the child is placed for adoption (“the first review”);
  - (b) no more than three months after the first review; and
  - (c) thereafter not more than six months after the date of the previous review, unless the child is returned to the agency by the prospective adopter or an Adoption Order is made.
- 5) Where paragraph (2) applies, the adoption agency must —
- (a) ensure the child and the prospective adopter are visited within one week of the placement and thereafter at least once a week until the first review and thereafter at such frequency as the agency decide at each review;
  - (b) ensure that written reports are made of such visits; and
  - (c) provide such advice and assistance to the prospective adopter as the agency considers necessary.
- 6) When carrying out a review the adoption agency must visit the child and so far as reasonably practicable ascertain the views of —
- (a) the child in the light of the child’s age and understanding;
  - (b) if the child is placed for adoption, the prospective adopter; and

- (c) any other person the agency considers relevant, in relation to each of the matters set out in paragraph (7)(a) to (f).
- 7) As part of each review the adoption agency must consider—
  - (a) whether placed or not, whether the adoption agency remain satisfied that the child should still be placed for adoption;
  - (b) the child's needs, welfare, progress and development, and whether any changes need to be made to meet the child's needs or assist the child's development;
  - (c) the existing arrangements for contact, and whether they should continue or be modified;
  - (d) where the child is placed for adoption the arrangements in relation to the exercise of parental responsibility for the child, and whether they should continue or be modified;
  - (e) the existing arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and whether there should be any re-assessment of the need for those services;
  - (f) in consultation with the appropriate agencies, the arrangements for assessing and meeting the child's health care needs and educational needs;
  - (g) subject to paragraphs (3) and (4) the frequency of the reviews.
- 8) Where the child is subject to a Placement Order and has not been placed for adoption at the time of the first six months review, the local authority must at that review —
  - (a) establish why the child has not been placed for adoption and consider what further steps the authority should take in relation to the placement of the child for adoption; and
  - (b) in light of that, consider whether it remains satisfied that the child should be placed for adoption.
- 9) The adoption agency must —
  - (a) set out in writing the arrangements governing the manner in which the case of each child is to be reviewed and must draw the written arrangements to the attention of —
    - (i) the child where reasonably practicable in the light of the child's age and understanding;
    - (ii) the prospective adopter; and
    - (iii) any other person the agency considers relevant.
  - (b) ensure that —
    - (i) the information obtained in respect of a child's case including the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child;
    - (ii) details of the proceedings at any meeting arranged by the agency to consider any aspect of the review of the case; and
    - (iii) details of any decision made in the course of or as a result of the review (including as to frequency of visits), are recorded in writing and placed on the child's case record.

- 10) The adoption agency must, so far as is reasonably practicable, notify —
  - (a) the child where it considers the child is of sufficient age and understanding;
  - (b) the prospective adopter; and
  - (c) any other person whom it considers ought to be notified of the outcome of the review and of any decision taken by it in consequence of the review.
- 11) Where the child is returned to the adoption agency in accordance with section 35(1) or (2) of the Act, the agency must conduct a review of the child's case as soon as reasonably practicable and in any event no later than 28 days after the date on which the child is returned to the agency.

### Adoption Reviews

The following is taken from the Welsh Government's Practice Standards and Good practice Guide: Reviewing and monitoring of a child or young person's Part 6 care and support plan:

13.11 The IRO should ensure that when a review is undertaken under the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005, when a child has been placed with prospective adoptive parents, all participants understand that the prospective adoptive parents have acquired some parental responsibility, but the child remains looked after until such time as an Adoption Order is made.

13.12 An adoption review should provide an opportunity for the placement to be scrutinised and appropriately challenged, in line with the requirements of s37(7) AA(W)R 2005.

13.13 An adoption review should consider a chronology of significant events for the child, since being placed, including any harm the child may have suffered, however caused, and the ongoing support needs of the child and prospective adoptive parents.

## 2.12 ADOPTION ORDER PROCEEDINGS

### The legal framework

The Annex A (The Family Procedure Rules) 2019 is the report made to the court where there has been an application for an Adoption Order. It has 5 sections (excluding Convention adoptions):

A: The Report and Matters for Proceedings

B The Child and the Birth Family

C The Prospective Adopter of the Child

D: The Placement

E: Recommendations

The report will, amongst other things, inform the court how the transition period has progressed, how settled the child appears and what the plans for adoption support are.

# Appendix 4

## Key Performance Measures relating to Life Journey Work

### KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

There are two key measures within National guidelines in relation to Life Journey materials. The first measures the number of children where life journey material has been provided by Matching Panel. Life Journey material at Matching Panel is defined as

- a draft later life letter and draft life story book.

The second measures the number of children placed for adoption for who life journey material has been provided to adopters by the second review. Life journey material at 2nd review is defined as

- Preparation work with the child, (direct work using family trees, timelines, story books, ecomaps that would go with the child at time of placement
- Later life letter

plus either

- Life story material – a book or folder or digital record of information about child's birth family, reasons for being looked after and why adopted, or
- Life story work – product of direct work, often thought of as “therapeutic” as a means of telling the story of a child's life history to enable the child to understand their past. This may include memory box, and build on a life story book.

Materials like a memory box or photo book will not be considered life journey material unless they are set in a context of direct work.

(NAS Performance Management Framework)

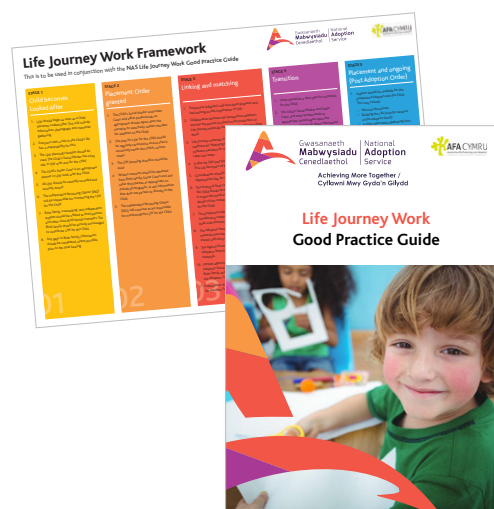
### LIFE JOURNEY BOOKS

*“I feel happy knowing that the photos, milestones, firsts and other anecdotes we have recorded have a place and will be shared with her as she gets older. We want her to know how precious she is!”*  
(Foster carer)

Photos taken during their time in foster care and then during transitions can be used as part of a number of Life Journey books created and supported by the team supporting the child and adopters. Most significantly, it is hoped that the idea of a 'Looking After' family will give the child a sense that the foster carers give permission for them to move on, to their 'Growing up' family. These books document the child's transition to their 'growing up' family and will help the child remember and make sense of the transition.

These books include:

- **About birth family book** – an explanation of some of the child's history
- **Looking after family book** – the child's time with their foster carers (and what foster carers do: look after)
- **Welcome to my family book** – created by the potential adopters
- **Moving to my new family information/book** – how the adopters met and got to know the child, with the help of the foster carers, and the activities that the child completed on their journey



# Appendix 5

## Book and activities that can be used during direct work with the child

This is certainly not an exhaustive list but just a few suggestions that might help and which you can add to your toolkit.

### IDEAS FOR A PLAY KIT LIST

- Soft blanket
- Play doh
- Play feathers
- Board and small rolling pin
- Owl Puppet
- Paper and pens/pencils
- Soft small ball: look for ones labelled decompression balls
- Bubbles
- Farmyard Animal set (preferably with some baby animals included)
- Farm play set: ideas: Duplo farm set: £20
- Soft farm set: £34
- Small play houses to denote “birth family home”, “foster family home” and “adopter’s home”

*Guidance for direct work. SEWAS/ Emma Decker Thomas 2020*

- Road map mat

You might also want to get a child friendly calendar or ask the foster carer to get one for each child to help with visual picture of what will be happening, when.



### JUST A FEW SUGGESTED SENSORY PLAY ACTIVITIES

**Play doh:** Feel the temperature of the play doh, squish and squeeze it talk about the colours and the smell. Roll it out to make shapes or use the cutters. Some children like to make families out of the play doh, just observe the sizes, colours and shapes of these families.

If a child needs a change from families, you might also pretend icecream or pancakes or favourite food – and use add sprinkles/ sauce etc before pretending to eat them.

**Feather Game:** Hold the feather gently in your hand and blow it to the child to catch in their hand, then ask the child to blow it to the carer who then blows it back to you. Experiment with different strengths of blowing and angles. Keep it light and ensure the child feels they can blow and catch. You can also experiment with how soft and tickling the feather may feel on a cheek or palm of a hand. Do not force this and suggest this happens with the foster carer and child.

**Cotton Wool Basket Ball:** Use 3 cotton wool balls to throw into the carer or child’s arma which they create a hoop with. (Ensure carers are aware that they can make the hoop as big as needed or move it to ensure the child “scores”. Take turns for everyone to be the hoop or thrower.

**Bubbles:** Blow bubbles for the child to catch and pop. The child will also want to blow the bubbles, it is really important that the adult always keeps hold of the base of the bubbles so bubble mixture doesn’t shower the room. If this has followed the feather game you can talk about the different types of blowing to get bubbles.

If the child blows too hard and the bubbles don’t appear I often suggested that the bubbles were so fast we couldn’t see them and they might need to blow some slower bubbles! If a child is very excited you can whisper to the child to pop a certain amount with a certain part of their body eg ‘let’s see if you can pop 3 with your elbow’.

**Weather Map:** the child sits with their back to you or the foster carer (depending on the levels of trust between the child and you. You explain that you will draw different weather on their back and they will need to guess what the weather is. Using firm pressure, draw different weather symbols on their back.

SUN (round circle with rays)

LIGHTENING (zig zag)

RAIN (light taps)

SNOW (bigger taps)

WINDY (swirling motion)



**Blanket and the Ball All About You game** (usually best for children 4 and under or very active children): Everyone holds a corner or edge of the blanket and moves the blanket to roll a soft ball around in the blanket. Whoever lets the ball roll off the blanket has to answer a question about the child. Have some lighter questions, such as “What is Jo’s favourite food?” (and try to make sure it’s things the adopters will know). Then ask the foster carers more serious questions like, “What does Jo need when she is sad?”

You can ask the child easy questions about their new family that they may have learnt from their books or that the adopter and child can work together to answer like, “What colour are Mummy’s eyes? (if the child is calling the adopter “Mummy”, if not use their first name) – the adopter and child can then look at each other for the child to answer.

Do about 10 questions but be aware this can feel very intense for the child so be sensitive to how they are finding the game.

#### Example All About You questions:

- I usually wake up at...
- For breakfast I like...
- For lunch I have...
- At school I enjoy...
- When I come home from school I like...
- My favourite food is...
- I don’t like to eat...
- I like to drink...
- My favourite TV programmes are...
- My favourite story is...
- I like to play...
- On weekends I...
- I like going to...
- I don’t like it when...
- When I’m sad or hurt I...
- I like hugs when...
- I go to bed at...
- At bedtime I need...
- I like sleeping with...

*Guidance for direct work. SEWAS/ Emma Decker Thomas 2020*



## JUST A FEW SUGGESTED BOOKS

### Paper Dolls by Julia Donaldson

A lyrical story of childhood, memory and the power of imagination.

A string of paper dolls go on a fantastical adventure through the house and out into the garden. They soon escape the clutches of the toy dinosaur and the snapping jaws of the oven-glove crocodile, but then a very real pair of scissors threatens.

Good if a child is playing about missing family and/or just playing the positive elements about their family. Can also be used for thinking about a child missing their foster carers. Useful to prepare a child for goodbyes

### Dennis the Duckling by Paul Sam Brooks

This charming illustrated book is ideal for very young children (aged 2-5 years old) who are leaving their birth families for the first time to be looked after by foster carers.

Dennis and his sister need someone to look after them, someone to help wash their feathers and feed them. A grown-up duck called Annie comes to talk with them.

### A Mother for Choco by Keiko Kasza

Not suitable for a child going to live with a same sex male couple. Sad and funny story about a child wondering about the need to find a family and the worry and wait

### Not Again Little Owl by Vivien Norris

A therapeutic picture book for children who are moving from a temporary to a permanent family. It focuses on children who have had multiple transitions. This is not a fairy tale but a powerful and moving story which gets alongside the child’s experience. It has been written for foster carers, adopters and professionals supporting children.

‘Stories are such an important tool for helping children to understand and to feel understood. This is a delightfully illustrated story which will be of great help for children who unfortunately have to face moving too many times. Believing that the final family is permanent is so hard for these children. Knowing that others understand this through sharing this story will be very supportive.’ Kim Golding, Clinical Psychologist and DDP Trainer.

### Finding a Family for Tommy by Rebecca Daniels

Lift the flap book so good for littler ones / under 3 – finding a family who provide what a child needs The book can be read in preparation for a move from foster care and during introductions to permanent carers or adopters. Children can struggle to articulate the complex emotions that arise during times of change, and very young children may not even be able to acknowledge their anxieties. This book can help to reassure them at every stage of the transition.



### **A Safe Place for Rufus by Jill Seeney**

Good for an anxious child who might be talking/ playing about scary memories

Change and transition, such as moving house, starting a new school or perhaps even leaving home, can cause confusion and uncertainty for very young children. If they have to move from one family to another, the change is often too big for them to full comprehend in advance; no matter how thorough the preparation, the child still has to take a very big leap into the dark. It takes time for children to trust enough to feel safe. Like Rufus, they have to discover a way to banish their fears, and like Rufus, they can be helped by finding a “safe place” of their own.



### **Chester and Daisy Move On – by Angela Lidster**

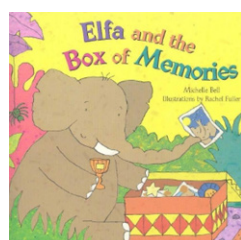
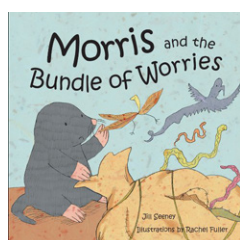
This popular and engaging picture book is for use with children who are moving on to adoption. It tells the story of two little bear cubs who have to leave their parents and live with a foster bear family. Soon they learn they are to be adopted. The story encourages children to compare their own stories with that of Chester and Daisy. Work pages are provided for the children to write about their own experiences. This book can be used with children aged 4 -10 years old to help them explore feelings about their past and their moves, and to help carers identify these issues from the child's perspective.

### **Morris and the Bundle of Worries – by Jill Seeney**

A charming picture book for young children in a range of situations, Morris and the Bundle of Worries shows that talking about problems, and facing worries with the help of others is more helpful than hiding your fears.

### **Elfa and the box of Memories – by Michelle Bell**

This is a beautifully illustrated picture book for young children on the importance of memories, sharing them, and finding ways of keeping them alive.



### **The Most Precious Present in the World – by Becky Edwards**

This simply written, engaging story focuses on the universal idea of looking like (or not looking like) your family. This is used to give adopted children the reassuring messages that not only are they very special to their adoptive parents, but that it is alright for them to have mixed feelings about their adoption.

### **Teenie Weenie in a Too Big World by Margot Sunderland**

A story for fearful children. One day Teenie Weenie finds himself in a scrumbly screechy place. It is full of noises and crashes and things that swoop and scratch. The worse it gets, the smaller Teenie Weenie feels. After a while, he feels so small that the tiniest insect tries to eat him up. Teenie Weenie feels terrified and desperately alone. But after a while along strolls a Wip-Wop bird who invites Teenie Weenie to come and have a chocolate muffin in his tree house. With the Wip Wop bird and his friend Hoggie, Teenie Weenie learns for the first time in his life all about the power of together. He comes to know how very different things look when it's an 'us' not just a 'me'. And so after that, whenever Teenie Weenie finds himself struggling alone with something too difficult or too frightening, he goes off and finds some together.

### **A Nifflenoo Called Nevermind by Margot Sunderland**

A story for children who bottle up their feelings. Nevermind always carries on whatever happens! Each time something horrible happens to him he just tucks his feelings away and carries on with life. Find out what happens to Nevermind and how he begins to understand that his feelings do matter, how he learns to express them and stand up for himself.



# Appendix 6

## Delegation of Parental Responsibility checklist

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 introduces the requirement for parental responsibility to be shared with prospective adopters post placement. The extent that such parental responsibility can be exercised is at the discretion of the local authority. It is a requirement that this be considered at an early stage prior to the plan for the placement of a child with specific adopters being presented to Panel. This must therefore be discussed and considered at the Adoption Placement Meeting and included within the Adoption Placement Report. Panel will comment on this aspect of the plan. It should be considered again as part of the Adoption Placement Plan and will be kept under review by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) at each Review until the child is subject to an Adoption Order.

Birth parents should be notified once a child is made subject to a Placement Order as to how they may exercise their restricted parental responsibility until the child is placed for adoption. This will be kept under review and birth parents notified of any changes. For many birth parents this may mean that they are kept informed about certain key events until the child is adopted. The checklist below provides an aide memoir for determining the areas where prospective adopters can exercise parental responsibility. The list is not exhaustive.

### PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY (PR), THE ADOPTION AGENCY (AA) AND PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS (PA)

#### THE LAW

##### S25 Adoption and Children Act 2002

##### (1) This section applies while –

(a) A child is placed for adoption under s19 or an adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption under that section, or

(b) A Placement Order is in force in respect of a child.

##### (2) Parental responsibility for the child is given to the agency concerned.

##### (3) While the child is placed with prospective adopters, parental responsibility is given to them.

##### (4) The agency may determine that the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or of prospective adopters, is to be restricted to the extent specified in the determination.

Parental responsibility is, therefore, given to the AA:

- If there is consent to place for adoption (s19) and the child has not yet been placed with prospective adopters
- If there is consent to place for adoption (s19) and the child has been placed with prospective adopters
- If there is a Placement Order (s21) and the child has not yet been placed with prospective adopters
- If there is a Placement Order (s21) and the child has been placed with prospective adopters

Note that children subject to s19 consent or Placement Orders remain 'looked after' until such time as an Adoption Order is made

Note also that, with relinquished children who may be placed to begin with under s76 SSWB(W)A 2014, s76 does not give the LA or AA PR. PR is only given to the AA once there has been properly conducted consent under s19.

## PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY ONCE A CHILD IS PLACED

S24(3):

- AA holds overriding PR
- AA may decide how parents exercise their PR
- AA may decide how prospective adopters exercise their PR

**How the adoption agency (local authority) allocates PR upon placement**

The adoption agency/ local authority who was granted the Care Order and Placement Order, or who obtained consent for adoption from parents, has PR for the child, not the regional collaborative. If clarification is needed as to who can make a particular decision, the prospective adopter(s) should contact the adoption social worker allocated to the family and seek preliminary advice. The adoption social worker can then contact the child's social worker for a decision if necessary.

Decisions which are made by the AA (LA) alone are marked AA.

Decisions which may be made by the prospective adopters independently are marked PA.

Decisions where the AA will consult with prospective adopters but still makes the decision are marked AA/PA.

Decisions where the AA will consult with (birth) parents are marked AA/P.

### The role of statutory reviews

Any difficulties in keeping to the terms set out below or any need for clarification should be dealt with at statutory reviews.

Any Information sharing on accidents / injuries should always be revisited at statutory reviews.

HEALTH	
<p><b>Consent</b></p> <p>Consent for emergency medical treatment. PA's should have a letter of consent / explanation from the AA/LA on them at all times in case of any queries</p> <p>Consent for routine medical treatment, e.g. prescriptions for antibiotics/ asthma medication</p> <p>Referrals resulting from a GP appointment, e.g. paediatric /audiology / ophthalmology / occupational therapy / physiotherapy / incontinence</p> <p>Consent to prophylactic (preventative) treatment (normal immunisations)</p> <p>Consent to planned surgery</p> <p>School medical appointments</p> <p>Consent to dental treatment (without anaesthetic) (with anaesthetic)</p> <p>Opticians appointments</p> <p>Referral to / participation in counselling / psychotherapeutic services</p> <p>Self referrals for privately funded psychological assessment / treatment (i.e. not referred through GP)</p> <p>Alternative medical treatment (e.g. cranial osteopathy / homeopathy)</p> <p>Piercings</p>	<p>PA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>AA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>AA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>AA</p> <p>AA</p> <p>AA/PA</p>
<p><b>Information sharing</b></p> <p>PA to inform AA if no immunisations undertaken when advised</p> <p>In the day that it occurs PA to inform the child's social worker and adoption social worker of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any accident and visit to GP or A&amp;E</li> <li>any injury and visit to GP or A&amp;E</li> <li>any serious illness and visit to GP or A&amp;E</li> </ul> <p>If out of hours, the PA's should contact the out of hours social work team (child's social worker to ensure they have contact details)</p> <p>AA to inform P of any major illness or major medical procedure</p>	<p>PA</p> <p>PA</p> <p>AA/P</p>

DAY CARE / NURSERY / EDUCATION	
Choice of day care provision / nursery / school	AA/PA
Decision on if / when child commences day care / nursery / school	AA/PA
Decisions on amount of time spent at day care / nursery / school (phased introductions / part time / full time)	AA/PA
Decision on change of day care / nursery / school	AA/PA
Planning for introductions to / liaising and meeting with day care / nursery / school / receiving information on child	PA
Advocating for child in relation to educational provision (SEN)	AA/PA
Consent for out of school activities	PA
Consent for school activities involving overnight stays	AA/PA
Private consultation (ie not referred through nursery / school) with educational psychologist / speech and language therapist	AA/PA

RELIGION	
Involvement of child in regular religious activity if no change in religion from birth family	PA
Proposed change of / introduction to new faith	AA
Baptism / confirmation / formal introduction to a particular faith	AA

HOLIDAYS AND SOCIAL	
Application for passport	AA
Agreement to take child out of the country	AA
Agreement to take child away from the family home for longer than 48 hours for a holiday / to visit relatives	AA/PA
Agreement to child taking part in any activity that requires parental consent	PA
Decision for the child to be known by a different first name	AA
Decision to change the child's surname (only after consent of P or direction of the court)	AA
Decision to arrange time limited care, from the PA's support network, and whom PA's consider suitable	PA

CONTACT	
Making contact arrangements with birth family beyond arrangements already made as part of the adoption placement plan	AA
Making contact arrangements with previous foster carers	AA/PA



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu** | National  
Cenedlaethol Adoption  
Service

National Adoption Service Central Team  
c/o City of Cardiff Council  
Room 409 County Hall , Atlantic Wharf  
Cardiff CF10 4UW

T: 029 2087 3927

[www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com)



**AFA CYMRU**  
association for fostering and adoption  
cymdeithas ar gyfer maethu a mabwysiadu

AFA Cymru  
Unit G14, Ty Antur  
Navigation Park,  
Abercynon CF45 4SN

T: 02920 761155

[www.afacymru.org](http://www.afacymru.org)

AFA Cymru  
W2 Morfa Clwyd Business Centre,  
84 Marsh Road, Rhyl,  
Denbighshire LL18 2AF

T: 01745 336336