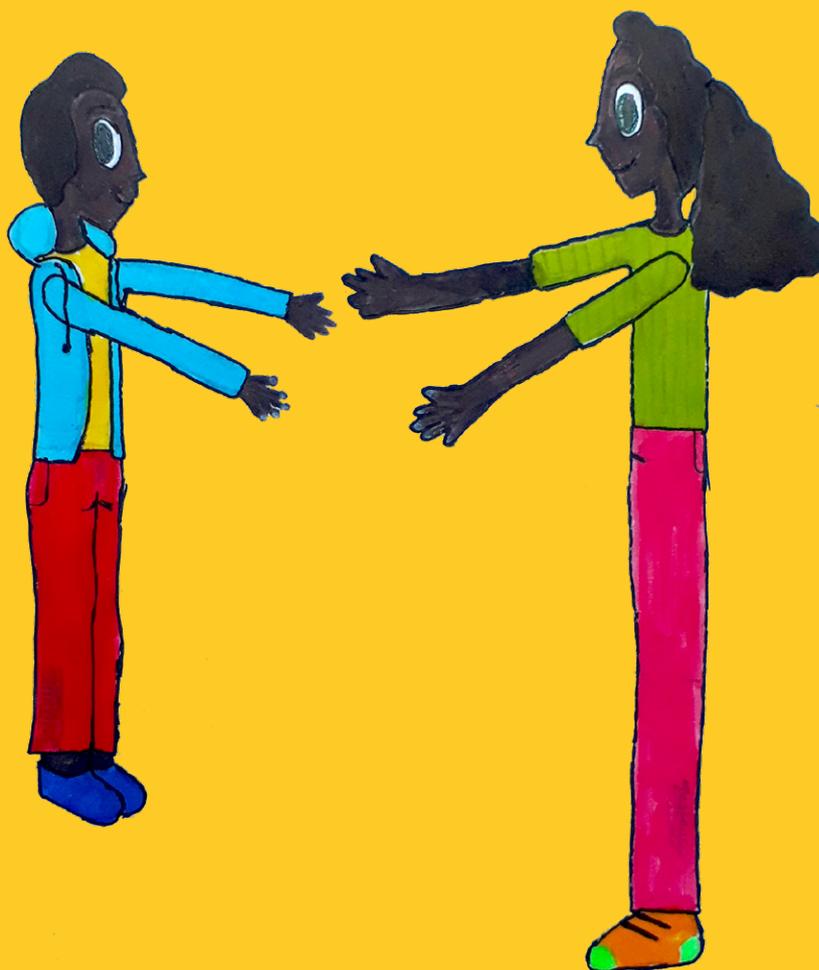




## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

# Contact

1



Transitions and Early Support

2

Working with Birth Parents

3

Adoption Support

4

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Cover illustration: Jess Coldrick

# Introduction

The guide is being written as we approach 100 years since the first adoption legislation in the UK (Adoption and Children Act 1926). Clearly there have been huge changes in that period. For much of the twentieth century the placement of a child was perceived as the 'end' of one part of a child's life with their identity being seen as being formed from the point of adoption. As late as the 1970's children were sent overseas to start a 'new life'. This concept of a fresh start was embedded in adoption law.

It was not until the Adoption Act 1976 that adult adoptees had the right to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate and it was the impact of adult adoptees telling their stories that led to the fundamental changes in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which came into force on the 31st December 2005. This Act was the first piece of adoption legislation to state that children's rights were paramount and it also set out a requirement 'to consider, and where appropriate plan, for contact with the birth family (including siblings).

The reality 15 years on is that contact in adoption has become what is described as *'largely formulaic (Featherstone et al 2018). Most contact is letterbox (indirect) and in the recent BASW enquiry (Featherstone, Gupta and Mills 2018) the current situation is summarised as 'The current contact arrangements are a poorly resourced model' and they called for a 'significant rethink of approaches to contact and connection between adopted children and their birth family'*

The Wales Adoption Cohort Study report (2019), looked at the experience of contact with brothers and sisters living elsewhere and found that four years post placement half were not in contact with birth siblings and of the 17 with plans for indirect contact 11 had not gone to plan. Boyle (2017) found in her work that children consistently wanted more sibling contact. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires the Part 6 care and support plan to give an explanation about the decision making in relation to contact plans where siblings are separated.

The work around siblings has had attention in Scotland and there is a drive to bring that to the forefront. Young people themselves prefer terms such as 'brothers and sisters' rather than siblings and 'keeping in touch' rather than contact. The guide has used the terms 'siblings' and 'contact' as 'umbrella terms' while accepting concerns about their use.

Neil, Beek and Ward's longitudinal study of contact for adopted children (2014) has been influential in promoting discussion about contact and this plus the Featherstone et al work has been referred to throughout the guide.

Contact is not appropriate in every situation, but even looking to countries as close as Northern Ireland and across the world to places like Australia, the approach to post adoption contact is very different. In both countries the expectation is to maintain a degree of contact and generally face to face contact. Clearly cultural expectations are significant. In MacDonald's work in 2017 95 of 123 adoptive families had direct contact.

In the Adoption Barometer (2018) as part of the survey results re contact, they say:

*'Experiences of contact with birth families are a mixed picture, both in terms of the support families are receiving, and the effectiveness of the contact agreements. More than 70% report that birth parents do not regularly participate in existing agreements. More adoptive families are open to direct contact than are involved in it.'*

Post adoption contact requires support to be available to all parties, and birth family members will require that to enable them to engage in the agreements.

It has to be acknowledged that most children who are adopted now have experienced a range of traumas and as such relationships with birth family members can be complex and there is the risk of re-traumatising via contact in some situations, that risk applies to both direct and indirect contact (Macaskill, 2002) and should be considered carefully as part of any contact assessments and support built in accordingly.

Howe and Steele, 2004 p213 state:

*'Once a child has suffered from repeated incidents of trauma, relatively little is required on subsequent occasions ...to trigger the same kind of responses that the initial trauma provoked ...in effect, contact can re-traumatise the child.'*

This guide looks to promote good practice by looking at each child as a unique individual. The focus needs to be the child's well-being throughout their life and any contact discussed and promoted in the guide is based upon the presumption that contact is agreed, supported and reviewed to ensure that it is always in their best interests.

## The status and purpose of this guide

This guide is constructed to build upon the existing legal framework for adoption and adoption support in Wales. It 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 significant progress in developing adoption and adoption support services. These guides aim to reflect and enhance that progress.

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

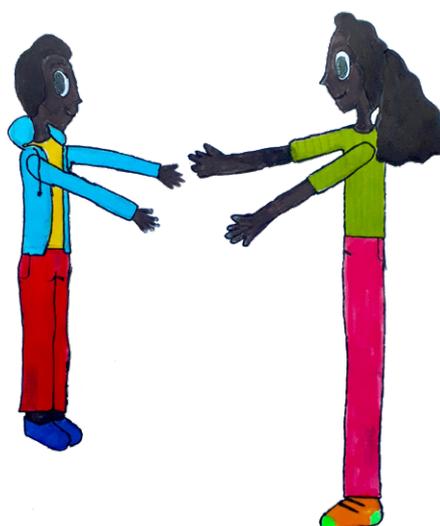
- Keeping in touch with birth family, and especially siblings, should be seen as positive and in the child's best interests
- Decision making should take account of the individual child's needs, circumstances and wellbeing
- Post adoption contact should not be seen as a fixed decision and should be reviewed over the course of childhood in order to meet the child's ongoing / changing needs
- A range of contact options should be considered that takes into account the child's needs, and also the circumstances and needs of the adoptive and birth family
- Early and timely support should be offered to all parties to enable them to participate in contact that is safe and meaningful.
- 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:

- Working with Birth Parents
- Transitions and Early Support
- 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> 1	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> 2	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> 3	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

### S 34(1) Children Act 1989

During care proceedings there is a duty to provide 'reasonable contact'. It is usual for parental contact to be the subject of a care contact order under s34(3). This order is automatically discharged with the making of the Placement Order.

### S95 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:

This duty applies to all looked after children, whether accommodated under s76 SSWB(W)A or subject to an interim Care Order (s38) or Care Order (s31) CA. s95(1)(c) will apply to siblings and to extended family members who are important to the child.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Family meetings

*'It's really important to get information about the wider family at an early stage (pre PLO if possible). When I have seen this happen, important people don't get lost to the child along the way'*

Local authority lawyer

- When a child is first looked after, there is a risk in the contact plan that the focus on the immediate family could risk 'important people' to the child being overlooked
- The child's social worker (CSW) should use every opportunity to hold regular family meetings to highlight people who are significant to the child (Care Crisis Review recommendation)
- This more routine use of family meetings at the PLO stage and after is a way of ensuring that information about family and important family members is obtained and therefore will be available when developing the contact plan, if the child is not placed with family.

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



## Contact with wider family members

*'We learned a lot during Covid-19 about the different ways a child can keep in contact with the wider family – grandparents especially.'*

Child's social worker



During care proceedings the CSW must give consideration to:

- Contact with extended birth family members where there is a significant relationship with the child and ongoing contact would be in the child's best interests
- Contact with a family member following the breakdown of a kinship / connected persons placement, or where the family member has played a large and positive part in the child's life before care proceedings
- Being creative about forms of keeping connected, as this will enable more relationships to be sustained during care proceedings. This will include a greater use of remote contact with members of the wider family, where direct contact cannot be facilitated on a regular basis (for example where frequent contact with parents takes up a lot of child and foster carer time or where there is large geographical distance)
- Lessons learned during Covid which may begin to transform the way we look at contact in adoption. For example, if grandparents or other family members have had successful remote contact during care proceedings, can that contact extend into the adoptive placement and beyond the Adoption Order?
- Remote sibling contact established during care proceedings (either alongside or instead of direct contact) may be able to be extended into adoptive placement and beyond the Adoption Order.

### 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 proactive contact between the CSW and the regional adoption service at the earliest opportunity.

## HOW PLANS FOR POST ADOPTION CONTACT SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED

Contact planning tool: Beth Neil

[www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/frontlineresources/frontlinebriefing](http://www.rip.org.uk/resources/publications/frontlineresources/frontlinebriefing)

*'There should be a clear analysis of risk that informs the contact plan. This should be comprehensible to the child as an adult.'*

Neil, (2009)

- The need to balance security and risk for children is undeniable but over-estimating risks may deny some children (and the birth family and adoptive parents) a satisfying and valuable experience
- The CSW will undertake an assessment of risk. What are the benefits and risks for the indirect / remote / direct contact continuing or being established? Can any risks be reduced by the provision of support?
- The CSW will ensure that contact plans are individual and the reasoning for them clearly explained; they should be subject to review and informed by the child's wishes and feelings. Observation is important to inform the plan with younger children or those who have difficulty expressing their views
- At the 2nd LAC review when permanency options are discussed the IRO should ensure that all the information/evidence required has been considered and has informed the contact plan
- It is the CSW's responsibility to complete the CAR/B; the first plan for post adoption contact must be in this document in order for support plans to be put in place at an early stage
- Life journey work must also be undertaken by the CSW at this stage. Information collected should include who is/is not important to the child in terms of maintaining contact.

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

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

To listen to Beth Neil talking about her research findings visit:

[www.adoptionresearchinitiative.org.uk/study5.html](http://www.adoptionresearchinitiative.org.uk/study5.html)

# Placement Order Proceedings

## 1.2

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

26 Adoption and Children Act 2002:

S27(4) ACA

S1(4)(a)(f) ACA.

Once a Placement Order is made the provisions of s34 Children Act cease to apply and the provisions of s26 ACA take their place. S26 applies to the entire period from Placement Order, through placement with prospective adoptive parents, to the making of the Adoption Order.

The major difference between s34 CA and s26 ACA is that there is no longer a presumption of reasonable contact taking place once the child is subject to a Placement Order. The Placement Order is signposting the child for an adoptive placement and so s26 contact performs a different function.

In planning for a Placement Order the child's social worker needs to consider two elements of contact:

- 1) The contact to take place during the course of the Placement Order, both before and after transitions and placement;
- 2) The contact to take place once the Adoption Order is made. This contact is rarely subject to an order (see below for more details).

It is very important to plan for these two different types of contact separately and to make them clear in the care plan. The fact that contact is reduced or ceased under s26 during transitions and the early days of placement does not mean that there is an automatic assumption that no direct contact will take place once the Adoption Order is made:

In considering post adoption contact at this early stage, the following checklist, taken from the case *Re B*, set out below, should be adhered to. The additions in black reflect the requirements on the respective professionals involved

**Re B (A child) (Post Adoption Contact) [2019] EWCA Civ29**

- 1) Adoption agencies to ensure that all prospective adopters and all adoption social workers fully understand the developing research when undergoing training and approval.
  - Prospective adopters need to consider at the preparation course stage the loss for the child in losing contact with parents, siblings, relatives, foster carers and friends. The 'string' exercise is a very useful tool as it provides a physical

experience of the number of children involved in the child's life at the time of Placement Order into matching. Prospective adopters can then be asked who they think should remain in the child's life in some way following placement and consider how the maintenance of links can be a positive feature of the child's adoptive family life. For details of the string exercise see **Appendix 11**.

- 2) In every case where direct post adoptive contact is a realistic option, the local authority should file, during the placement proceedings, the best information available as to the pool of 'open' adopters nationally and to ensure this is as specific to the subject children as possible.
  - Each region and VAA should encourage prospective adopters to consider the benefits of direct contact when it is in the child's best interests. All adoption support plans should take contact agreements into account and have mechanisms for reviews. Refer to **NAS Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**.
- 3) The child's social worker and the children's guardian to consider the significance of the research studies in every case.
  - The CSW will undertake a risk and benefits analysis of the prospect of contact (both direct and indirect), now and possibly in the future, with each important person in the child's life, including siblings (see below). This is in addition to any general risk assessment undertaken during care proceedings as it has a different purpose
- 4) The court to provide full reasons in determining any s.26 application.
  - See above for an analysis of s26 contact and the importance of distinguishing this type of contact with post Adoption Order contact
- 5) sibling contact to be considered as an entirely separate exercise from parental contact
  - See below
- 6) an open and frank dialogue between social workers, prospective adopters and birth parents and if sufficiently mature, siblings about the child's needs, possibly with a face to face meeting
  - See below for details on face to face meetings.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

*'Direct contact should be considered – we are not all risky'*

Birth parent

*'I have known adopters talk about contact with grandparents and I find this is not something social workers are always thinking about when plans are written'*

Adoption social worker



- In writing the CAR/B the CSW will provide a full and lively picture of the relationships that are / have been important to the child and the benefit for the child of those relationships continuing. This will include parents, siblings and other important family members
- The CSW will complete the ACA 2002 welfare checklist, which looks at the likely impact of losing relationships if adoption is the plan
- Unsuccessful kinship carers who, whilst not able to care for the child long term, may be able to sustain contact and support the development of a child's identity. The CSW should always bear these family members in mind for future contact
- The CSW should use **Appendix 5** for parents and **Appendix 6** for siblings for setting out the contact, the support needed to ensure the contact takes place and the review of the contact from the date of placement to the date of the Adoption Order. At a later date, when the post adoption contact is confirmed, the **Appendices 7, 8 and 9** (contact agreements for post Adoption Order) will be used
- The Agency Decision Maker (ADM), at the 'should be placed for adoption' decision stage, will ensure that the proposed care plan contains appropriate contact plans, with support, for the child.

### Plans for contact with siblings where the plan is for separate placements

*Sibling relationships are the most significant bonds that we can have. We know that most children and young people want to keep in touch with their brothers and sisters, and mourn deeply when this is severed'*

Voices from Care (Conference 2019)

- The CSW needs to pay particular attention to siblings and, where they have to be separated, the reasons why must be clearly evidenced and recorded in the CAR/B

*'It was just knowing that the local authority would arrange a venue for us all (grandparent foster carer and older siblings with adoptive family) and check in with us before and after the contact, that made it do-able.'*

Adoptive parent



*'I don't see a detailed analysis of the effect of losing contact and the emotional harm that is going to do to the child. In case after case it feels like a cut and paste job that a formula is applied if you are not together'*

A solicitor relating to sibling plans in The Birbeck University study

- If siblings are to be separated, the CSW will undertake an assessment of the needs for those siblings to remain in contact, irrespective of where the separated sibling lives or is planned to live. Geographical distance should not be a barrier, particularly when remote contact may be utilised

*'It is important that they know they have siblings and can see them regularly as it is beneficial to their welfare ...at the end of the day, a child is the one suffering for something they did not do and being taken away from their natural family.'*

Birth mother



- For those children whose siblings may either remain looked after, remain at home with parents or are subject to a special guardianship order, the CSW will provide a risk and benefits analysis of the risk the prospective adoptive family may be exposed to if indirect, remote or direct contact is instigated and sustained. This analysis will take into account the life long importance of sibling relationships
- 'The CSW will consider a plan for sibling contact under s26 ACA during placement and before Adoption Order (see **Appendix 6** for agreement)

*...there was a view that early negotiations with the adoption agency about proposed arrangements (for sibling contact) needed to be explicitly recorded. At times, ambiguous documentation has led to confusion or uncertainty about the recommended plan by professionals for contact and there were instances that this had led to contact faltering'*

Meakings et al, (2019)

- A contact plan at the Placement Order stage must be accompanied by a detailed and robust support plan, compiled by the CSW, to cover the period from Placement Order to placement and on to Adoption Order and beyond. This plan will have a commitment to support the adoptive family in maintaining and / or developing the contact, which can then be crystallised when the adoption support plan is formulated upon matching. It is the work put in at this early stage that makes it more likely for sibling relationships and contact to be maintained and developed.

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The provisions of s26 ACA 2002 continue to apply and either the terms of a s26 contact order or the agreed schedule of reducing contact should be adhered to. If the contact plan is, for some reason, not adhered to, then the CSW should inform their legal department.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Work with the child

*'It was so critical that the foster carer was sat alongside when I was talking to the child, as they heard what I was saying and could answer any questions the child had afterwards. This meant I was confident that the child was well supported as they began to process things.'*

Child social worker



- At this stage the CSW should work with the foster carer, with assistance from the allocated adoption social worker (ASW) or transitions worker and the foster carer's Supervising Social worker (SSW) to help them understand what is happening and why the pattern of contact is changing / will change.
- During the family finding process the child's contact with family members will probably have been reduced in line with the s26 contact plan. The CSW should keep a close eye on the quality of contact and the child's response to the contact. Depending on the child's age the child's social worker will be talking to the child about why the contact is reducing, in line with LJW.
- In family finding the CSW will be looking at the prospective adoptive parent(s) openness and ability to commit to the contact that has been assessed to be in the child's best interests:

### Work with Adopters

(in preparation training and during assessment)

*'Contact was discussed and explored in detail on the course. I also clearly recall the course lead highlighting the value of contact. This changed many opinions in the room in favour of maintaining contact in its various forms'*

Adoptive parent



*'The findings included that generally adoptive parents had respect for the child's previous family ties. Adopters had a positive attitude towards helping children with contact, (especially sibling contact) and making sense of their identity, but often struggled with a lack of professional support. There was a tendency amongst agencies towards a blanket policy of indirect contact rather than planning more flexible individual arrangements'*

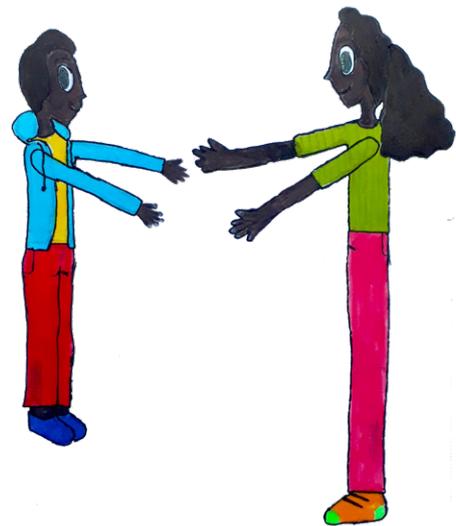
Meakings et al (2019)

- A clear message needs to be given to prospective adopters from the 1st visit onwards about expectations in relation to contact and the fact that adoption is very different in nature from that seen in the media
- Agencies need to be clear that contact is inevitable through social media, and so maintaining openness is more likely to provide some control for the adoptive family.
- The use of adopted adults who have come through care proceedings coming to talk during preparation courses can aid an understanding of the need for openness. Similarly the use of adopters and young people who have experience of contact can support prospective adopters to consider it in a positive light

- Exercises can be used that promote empathy in preparation training: Some regions use a case study and ask prospective adopters to put themselves in the birth parents' shoes and write a letter several years on from the point of placement.
- Prospective adopters need, during assessment and preparation, to reach a point where they will be able to accept adoption is different to biological parenting and that their child(ren) will always have connections to another family, regardless of the level of contact
- Assessments should evidence prospective adopters' capacity to be empathic and accepting of the dual connection of the child, as this will impact on their capacity to manage future contact
- There needs to be an analysis of prospective adopters' 'communicative openness' (Brodzinsky 2005). This will impact upon their capacity to support and sustain contact arrangements.

*'I did feel that it would be great if I could have taken him on and I went down to the hospital when he was born. It was a rather strange day because (birth mother) had left him in intensive care and I saw him there and it was a great wrench for me not to be able to take him on myself. So the way it worked out with (adoptive mother) has been good for me personally because I see so much love from her, this openness has just been enormously valuable'*

Grandparent: Contact after Adoption page 31



## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As with family finding, the provisions of s26 ACA 2002 continue to apply and either the terms of a s26 contact order or the agreed schedule of contact should be adhered to. If the contact plan is not adhered to, then the child's social worker should inform their legal department.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

*'I recognise the importance of contact as part of helping a child understand their identity, of making sense of their heritage and understanding their position in two families'*

Child social worker



- The child's contact needs will be updated within the CAR/B by the CSW and reasons for decisions clearly documented
- It is particularly important to ensure that consideration has been given to contact with siblings, with an explanation about how that relationship will be sustained if siblings are not to be placed together
- There is a need for the CSW and ASW to ensure that the child's contact needs can be met by the proposed match. Are the implications of the ongoing and proposed contact clearly understood and will there be a long term commitment to that contact by the prospective adopters?
- The CSW is to ensure that by this point the child will have an age appropriate understanding of their situation and a clear, consistent narrative that can be built upon and used during transitions. Refer to **NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide**
- This narrative will be supported by life journey work. See NAS Life Journey Work online archive
- Ongoing work must continue with the birth parent where it is possible to do so in order to support them in understanding the narrative that is being shared with the child.

Refer to **NAS Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide** and work of Reflect.

*'We have had siblings placed in separate adoptive families and where the prospective adopters were on the same preparation course. This has worked really well and they have become almost extended family, seeing each other on a number of occasions over the year.'*

Regional adoption social worker



Where sibling contact is planned and all siblings are to be in adoptive placements

- ASW's and CSW's should keep in mind sibling contact when considering possible adoptive families in terms of a number of factors such as geographical distance / personalities and interests.

Where sibling contact is planned with looked after siblings, siblings with special guardianship orders and younger siblings remaining with parents

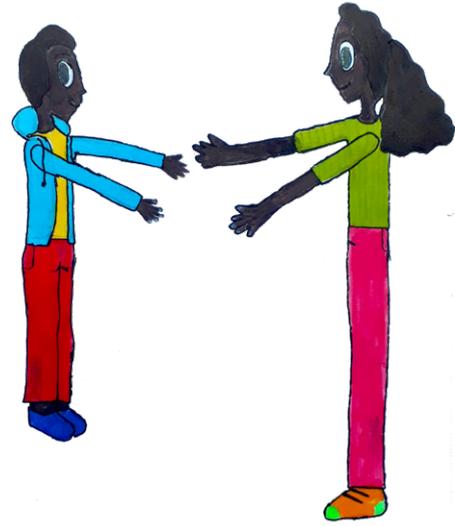
- The CSW and ASW must consider together how the present contact plan with siblings could work with this particular proposed match
- Where at all possible, prospective adopters should meet the older siblings who remain in foster care or in special guardianship arrangements

*'When we met the older sisters we were able to see them as people in their own right – still quite small themselves. It meant that it was easier to keep in touch because we could picture them and talk about them to our child. We were also able to tell the sisters that we would look after and love their baby sister. They needed to know that.'*

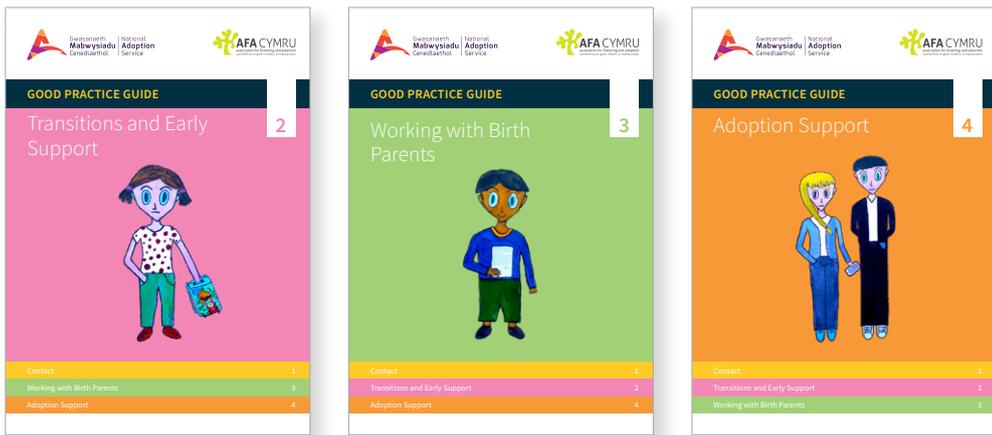
Adoptive parent



- The ASW to confirm to the prospective adopters that the proposed contact has been subject to a full risk assessment and has been developed in line with the child's needs and well-being
- The ASW to confirm to the prospective adopters and share with them the support plan which will accompany the contact plan
- Indirect and remote contact, if direct contact is not possible, will be considered in a detailed way, taking into account the age and need of the child and the siblings concerned. Both ASW and CSW will avoid the automatic formulaic path towards annual or twice yearly indirect contact as a matter of course. Detailed discussions with prospective adopters will help to create a more tailor made contact plan
- Remote contact should always be considered as a separate medium for contact when direct contact is not possible or as a means of keeping in touch between direct contacts.



Remote contact has many benefits as a way of keeping in touch from the child's point of view: 'I know they are alright / I know what they look like / I can make them laugh / I know what I can get them for their birthday'. It also has advantages from the adopters' point of view: 'little and often may be better as it becomes part of the ordinary fabric of life'



## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Both the CSW and the ASW will bear in mind that they will need to provide evidence to panel and to the ADM of the plans for contact AND the support plan underpinning the proposed contact (see below)

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- The ASW, in conjunction with the CSW, will complete the adoption support plan which clearly indicates what support will be required to enable connections to be maintained and how that support will be provided.

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

### Understanding the Child meeting (UtC)

- An Understanding the Child meeting, arranged by the regional adoption service, will consider the plans for contact for the child and help the prospective adopter to see the importance of keeping particular connections.

Refer to **NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide**.

*‘These have given adopters an idea of what the dynamics may be like going forward with foster carers and have enabled them to make important links, and appreciate fully the relationships that exist for the child(ren)’*

A child’s social worker talking about an understanding the child meeting



*‘By helping adopters to understand the birth family’s experiences it will assist adopters to develop empathy. Also when considering a trauma timeline which highlights losses it will further help adopters understand the importance of maintaining contact with birth family members, siblings and foster carers’*

Regional adoption social worker



- The ASW and CSW will ensure that the understanding the child meeting helps to start to develop positive relationships with foster carers and with prospective adopters of siblings

### Farewell contact

Although prospective adopters’ meetings with parents and farewell contacts will not take place until after a match has been to matching panel and ADM decision, they are considered at the matching planning stage as the planning for them takes place before panel and ADM.

- Consideration is to be given by the CSW as to the timing of the farewell contact (see **Appendix 10** for Good Practice Example from Swansea Reflect and Refer to **NAS Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**)
- Children are prepared for farewell contact

Refer to **NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide**.

*‘Children are prepared for the farewell contact as part of the direct work being undertaken to move them on to their adoptive families Narratives are developed for that contact which follow on from the material/book that have been used. Foster carers have this and the adoption support team share it with birth parents. The worker uses paper dolls with the message that even if you don’t see somebody the memories stay in your head so that children understand they won’t be forgotten. All adults involved understand this message which hopefully encourages contact to be sustained’*

Regional adoption social worker



*‘It was useful to bring together the separate adopters of siblings at understanding the child meetings, as this has helped develop relationships between adopters and led to firmer commitments from adopters to direct sibling contact post adoption which is still successful and ongoing years after the child appreciation day’*

Regional adoption social worker



## Meetings between parents and prospective adopters

- A meeting between parents and prospective adopters should be planned at this stage

*'We liked her and felt for her during that meeting. We knew after the meeting that if the children wanted to see her in the future we would have been happy for that to happen'*

Adoptive parents on meeting the children's mother



- A parent / prospective adopter meeting should be normative (that is usual) where that is safe

See **Appendix 5** where a meeting with parents is included in the written agreement

Refer to **NAS Transitions and Early Support** and **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guides**.

Sydney and Price (2014, p.76) suggest some messages prospective adoptive parents could give to the birth family during a meeting that could assist contact in the future. While these need to be individual, examples are:

- She will always know she has a birth family
- When she is old enough and asks to meet you, I will support her
- We will do our best to explain why you could not look after her in a sensitive and caring way
- She will be able to look at photos of you when she wants to
- We will think about the talents, interests and physical features she has that come from you and be sure to let her know about those

## The research

*'Where indirect contact was planned, a one off meeting between the adoptive parents and birth relatives was usually highly valued by both parties, and increased the chances that indirect contact would be sustained over the years'*

(Neil, Beek and Ward 2014, Page 5, 1 of key findings)

## The prospective adopters

*'Yes, we were pleased to have the opportunity to meet with both the children's birth parents and talk about the children and their hopes for them. It was good to be able to put faces to people and recognise their vulnerabilities and challenges. We have been able to show the children photos that were taken whilst we were together'*

Prospective adopter on meeting parent



## The birth parent

*'No, I didn't meet the prospective adopters. I was supposed to but the date kept getting changed and then in the end I was told I couldn't meet them. I prepared myself for meeting them for a good few months. In my opinion I think it would have helped me to meet them because then I would know what kind of people my son was going to. I also believe it would have helped the prospective adopters to know me a little bit better and get a better picture of who I am instead of reading it or hearing it from someone else.'*

Birth parent re absence of meeting with adopters



*'I have never heard a birth parent regret meeting prospective adopters. It is an incredibly difficult thing to do but it gives them the opportunity to pass on information and sometimes to 'give permission' to the adopters to take on the child. This is such an important message for the child. And contact tends to be easier and more meaningful when that meeting has taken place.'*

Regional adoption social worker



# 1.6

## Matching Panel/ADM

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Proposed placement: Reg 32(3) Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005

Function of the adoption panel in relation to the proposed placement: 33(1) AA(W)R2005

S1(2) (4) ACA 2002

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

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- The panel has a key role in ensuring that the child's contact needs have been appropriately assessed and that the proposed match will meet those. In addition, the required support for any party is contained within the adoption support plan.
- Panels need to be provided with appropriate training/ information on contact, to ensure they are up to date with research findings
- The ASW will ensure that adoptive parents are clear about the proposed contact arrangements, understand why they have been agreed. Adoptive parents need to be able and willing to commit to the plan and will be asked to confirm this by panel
- The Agency Decision Maker (ADM), should be confident that the child's contact needs have been appropriately considered and will be met by the proposed match and that the adoption support plan contains the necessary support to enable that plan to occur.

# 1.7

## Introductions Planning

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

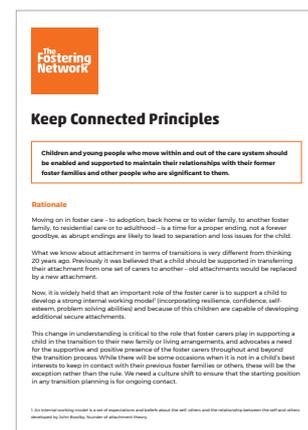
Refer to NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide.

- As part of the introductions planning, there needs to be agreement, facilitated by the CSW and ASW jointly, about how connections will be maintained by the child with the foster family following the period of introductions
- The agreement will include specific information about how and when the contact will happen, and the mechanism for amending / reviewing the current agreement
- The role of the foster carer is very important here and careful consideration needs to be given to that connection and how it is to be maintained

The Fostering Network report on keeping connected and suggested principles

[Not Forgotten: The importance of keeping in touch with former foster carers](#)

[Keep Connected Principles](#)



# 1.8

## Introductions

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Refer to NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide.

- The CSW and ASW are to support the prospective adopter(s) in understanding the importance of the foster carer in terms of current attachments and the child’s future journey

*‘... (adoptive parents) should retain some sort of meaningful contact with foster carers and their families. Such separations should be treated as emotionally significant for the child whether the child concerned is able to show feelings of distress or not.’*

(Boswell and Cudmore, 2013. p.35)

*‘Getting alongside the adopters and helping them as much as you can is one of the most important things a foster carer can do for a child.’*

Foster carer



*“Our adopted daughter, age 14, was going through a hard time and was in some distress. Through the help of a psychotherapist, we realised that she was really baffled by her early years and wanted more of the jigsaw pieces than we, as adoptive parents, had.*

*We had kept in touch with her foster carer (Christmas cards etc) but had not seen her for a number of years. We arranged a meet up at a neutral venue and she was able to tell our daughter how loved she had been when she had been with her, and how she still kept her in mind.*

*This was all our daughter needed at that time, and things became much easier for her after this visit. They keep in touch now and then on social media”*

An adoptive parent



# 1.9

## Placement

### THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**Under the terms of a Placement Order (and with consent under s19 ACA), parental responsibility is shared between the adoption agency (child’s local authority), prospective adoptive parents and parents:**

**S25(2) ACA 2002**

### WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Both CSW and ASW will encourage ‘communicative openness’ in the adopters that will support connections to be maintained and developed

*‘Old relationships do not need to be broken to allow new bonds to form. Children are capable of multiple attachments. Keeping in touch with a foster carer after a move can be very positive. Foster carers may be primary attachment figures for young children moving into adoption....It does not help to build trust in a new family if loved adults disappear from children’s lives.’*

Research in Practice: Contact – making good decisions for children in public law

### Reasons for post placement contact with foster carers:

- To minimize trauma of further loss and separation
- Helping prevent denial/avoidance of meaningful experience
- Revisiting emotions about separation at manageable levels
- Providing opportunities for support for the full range of feelings
- Decreasing ‘magical thinking’ and fantasies
- Decreasing loyalty issues and proactively working with ‘splits’ and conflicting feelings and thought: (Sydney and Price. 2014. p 91)

See **Appendix 5:** contact agreement between the local authority, regional collaborative and prospective adoptive parents to cover contact arrangements from placement to Adoption Order

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Any agreed contact should be adhered to on the part of prospective adopters and the agency. If there is a need to alter the terms of any agreed contact plan (either under a s26 contact order or by agreement) the legal department should be informed, as it will be a departure from what has been agreed or ordered by the court and the court may need to be informed.

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### Settling in letter

- Agreement should be made about the timing of a settling in letter (usually within 6 weeks). The ASW will take responsibility for arranging this and the IRO will confirm that it has been sent by the second review. This sets the tone that contact is expected and makes it more likely that contact will continue after the Adoption Order has been granted (see **Appendix 5: Written agreement for contact between placement and the making of the Adoption Order**)

*'At the start of a newly created letterbox when sending the first report, advice and information will be sent to the birth parent (altered according to the situation). It is also important to persist with adopters who are trying to disengage (in a polite way of course).'*

Regional adoption social worker

- If not happened already the ASW will provide the prospective adopters with some examples of settling in letters and will support them with this first attempt.

## Contact

*'Realistic and honest expectations on all sides. The contact has to be directed by the adopters and be completely child-centred'*

An experienced foster carer

- The CSW, with IRO overview, will ensure that any agreed contact with siblings is taking place and will reinforce the message that contact is in the child's long term best interests. See **Appendix 6**
- The ASW will provide supportive yet firm advice on keeping to agreements on contact, recognising that it is a vulnerable time for a newly constituted family
- The ASW (or Reflect) will support the parent(s) to ensure they are able to undertake the contact that has been agreed.

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

*'We ask for this to be done within 6 weeks from date of placement. It is something we – the adoption worker- hand deliver to birth parents and use the time to discuss plans for future contact'*

Regional adoption social worker



# Decision to apply for an Adoption Order

1.11

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Often considered at the 2nd adoption review, this is an opportunity for the IRO to ensure that all the agreed contacts have taken place and, if not, a plan is made to enable it to take place with clear timeframes and individual responsibilities outlined
- If the agreed contact has not happened the IRO will make arrangements with the CSW and ASW to follow up after the review and, depending on the reasons for the contact not having taken place, may choose to delay the recommendation / agreement to the prospective adopters making their application for the Adoption Order
- A member of the adoption support team will attend this meeting and advise on the review of the adoption support plan in anticipation of the application being made to court. Support for contact arrangements will be included in that review
- The ASW and CSW will complete the Annex A report: this to include any current and proposed future contact arrangements for the child and the support planned to enable successful contact
- The IRO is to have a copy of the written agreement relating to contact to ensure all actions have occurred as agreed

*'An adoption support plan that includes consideration of contact is a dynamic process and should never be fixed. Needs change over time – the child's, the adopters, the birth parents, and account should be taken of this.'*

Adoption social worker



# Adoption Order Proceedings

1.12

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### S51A ACA Post Adoption Contact

Parents require the leave of the court to make an application for post adoption contact at the final adoption hearing stage (s51A (4)(c)).

However the court may make an order of its own motion prohibiting contact (s51A(6)), taking account of the ACA welfare checklist (S1(4) ACA)

S46(6) ACA: considerations for contact before making an Adoption Order

The most recent case law on post adoption contact, is B (A Child: Post – Adoption Contact) [2019] EWCA Civ 29. See Appendix 3

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- The contact plan and support required to implement it should be clearly outlined in the Annex A, as above
- All practitioners involved need to think carefully about the language used in this period as legal roles are changing
- The ASW and CSW need to be clear about what agreements need to be signed and by whom and how such agreements will be monitored, reviewed and supported.

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### S51A ACA: Post Adoption Contact

Birth parents require the leave of the court to make an application for post adoption contact following an Adoption Order being made (s51A(4)(c)).

However the court may make an order of its own motion prohibiting contact (s51A(6)) with particular reference to s1(4)(a)(f)&(l) ACA (welfare checklist).

Refer to NAS Adoption Support Good Practice Guide

*'I couldn't love them any more if they were birth children but they have got a background that I don't belong to and I'm not a part of. And that won't change for any adopted child ever. They've got a past that belongs away from the adoptive family.... I think they should have that other side because it gives them a feeling of self worth, it makes them whole'*

From an adoptive parent quoted in 'Contact after Adoption'



*'Although contact plans are for children they are enacted by adults and may be helped or hindered by the relationships between them and the support for them that does or does not exist'*

Pause for thought (Research in Practice)

*'Keep it regular, keep it factual, keep it polite and be consistent'*

Adoptive parent on indirect contact



## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

### General Principles

#### At the start:

- There needs to be clear agreement regarding the language that will be used to describe people in any indirect, remote or direct contact
- There should be clarity in the agreements for arrangements for contact. The ASW and CSW, if contact is agreed before the Adoption Order is made, are to take joint responsibility for drafting and agreeing. See:

**Appendix 7:** written agreement for post adoption sibling contact,

**Appendix 8:** written agreement for post adoption contact with birth parents

**Appendix 9:** written agreement for post adoption contact with grandparents / other family members (to include a clause re confidentiality and birth parents)

- The timing of any contact should be agreed and recorded in the contact agreement. Agencies sometimes have views about the appropriateness of this occurring at specific times. There is no agreed research evidence to support specific timing. Sydney and Price (2014) suggest that introducing emotive information at an emotionally charged time such as a birthday for some children can be potentially harmful. Agencies also need to be aware that if they all occur at a specific time, i.e. Christmas they will need resources to manage that

*'About 40 per cent of birth relatives had lost contact with the adopted young person, with many arrangements stopping in adolescent years, often with no explanation. Birth relatives valued contact particularly because of the information it gave them about the adopted child.'*

Contact after Adoption Neil et al 2014, the summary page 34

*'If you keep the communication open you might receive important information for your child.'*

Adoptive parent



## As time goes by:

- The agreement will provide clarity on the timeframes and arrangements for contact and what follow up will occur if contact is not occurring as planned needs to be included as part of the contact support plan. This needs to be tied in with the review of the birth parents' support plan and any work that may be being undertaken or ongoing with them. Refer to NAS **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**.
- The 'keeping in touch' that the adoption support team may do with family, particularly after the first year post Adoption Order, will include a review of contact arrangements. Refer to NAS **Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**.
- Neil (2014, p 18) highlights that indirect contact is less likely to be sustained than direct contact, especially by birth family members, but adoptive parents should be encouraged to keep to maintain contact even if it is not reciprocated

***'We don't get anything back from our birth parents, but it's still important for us to write to them – so that they know that he is alright and doing well in the world. They deserve to know that. And when he's grown up we can say that we kept to our side of the agreement. That's important I think.'***

Adoptive parent



- Regions should provide support, either through support groups or through individual meetings to support birth parents in writing letters to their children. A review of contact arrangements should occur when 'the dust settles'. That might be before or after the Adoption Order is made and can take place at one of the points when the adoption support plan is reviewed. Those involved might be more willing/able at this stage to negotiate a longer term arrangement (Neil 2014). At this point people might be more open to direct contact. Refer to NAS **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**

***'Birth parents who are hostile to the planned placement at the final hearing may be able to accept and support the new family in time'***

Neil et al (2014)

- Feedback shows that in indirect contact the biggest risk is that birth parents will not send a letter which can make adoptive parents feel there is no point in them continuing the contact. This is a hugely difficult task for birth family members and the majority will require support for that. Refer to NAS **Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guide**.

***'Do help birth parents to understand how an ongoing exchange of information will benefit the child as they grow and mature. Do offer them support to do this.'***

Adoptive parent's advice to an adoption agency



- As part of 'keeping in touch' provisions with adoptive families the ASW will review the contact plan as part of a dynamic adoption support plan. There are particularly vulnerable points such as transitions to primary or secondary school and during adolescence which relate to identity formation when support and a more detailed review of contact arrangements might be required (Walker and Rueter 2014). Adolescent years are a high risk time for contact to cease and agencies will need to ensure there are opportunities for support to be offered should it seem likely that this will happen
- Agencies have the responsibility for ensuring that adoptive parents have up to date contact names and telephone numbers / email addresses. This can be done through newsletters and through communication with adoptive families in respect of indirect contact. Refer to NAS **Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**
- There is a need to ensure within an adoption support review that there is scope to look for support from the service if difficult information needs to be shared. The ASW will take responsibility for either undertaking or referring this work. Refer to NAS **Adoption Support Good Practice Guide**.
- The adoptive parents need to be encouraged by the ASW to link in ongoing events with life journey work to promote identity and ensure the child(ren) grows up with a coherent narrative. Keeping in touch on some basis is a good way for adoptive families to keep 'in charge' of arrangements:

***'Adoptive parents need to keep this dialogue open, particularly during adolescence: "would you like to contact your birth mum if you have been thinking about her – shall we do this together?" Also just check now and then "has anyone been in touch with you?" This was something we talked about on the prep course and it was really useful advice.'***

Adoptive parent of a teenager



***'Be open to all contact, be open to discussing the child's first family. From my reading adopted children are thinking about their original family even if they are not talking about them. Talk openly and respectfully and reassure the children that however they feel is okay.'***

Adoptive parent



***'Ask for help and advice, it may seem simple in the beginning but it will get more complex as children get older. Think ahead to social media.'***

Adoptive parent



## Social Media

Changes in social media need to be taken in account and acknowledged within the review of arrangements

- Updated workshops and support should be made available to adoptive families to help with talking to children about the benefits and challenges of social media as they grow up
- Adoption agencies should provide a clear message to birth parents that searching for their children on social media and then making contact with them may traumatise the child and so backfire on their aim to make contact
- Adoption agencies should make timely support for children / young people and adopters available when contact is made via social media in an unplanned and unsolicited way

## Direct Contact with Birth Parents

See Appendix 8

- Most arrangements in adoption are for indirect contact but direct contact arrangements where they are safe and made are more likely to be sustained. [www.rip.org.uk/frontline](http://www.rip.org.uk/frontline) contains helpful evidence about situations where direct contact is likely to be safe and sustainable

*‘And I suppose for me as well, a mother popping up out of the blue would feel very threatening so I don’t have that threat because we already have that relationship with her’*

Adopter who has direct contact quoted in ‘Contact After Adoption’, Page 14



Julie Selwyn et al (2015) gives a note of caution, *‘Each child will have a different experience of relationships within the family, they will have different roles be of different levels of maturity and have different experiences of abuse. Contact plans need to take account of this and ensure that damaging and abusive patterns of behavior are not repeated in contact.’*

## Contact with Siblings

See 3.2 for a detailed look at the planning for sibling contact

See Appendix 7

Following a referral from a 20 year old young woman looking to make contact with a younger sibling, for whom she had cared and who had gone on to be adopted: *‘It was heart breaking to meet a child who was grieving for a sibling who hadn’t passed away, who only lived a few miles away. Each time I receive a referral about a sibling left behind who has never had contact with their younger adopted sibling (when they had previously lived together) it always seems like a big injustice to me.’* Senior adoption social worker

- Sibling contact is the most likely form of direct contact to be agreed and sustained
- The opportunities for keeping connected remotely should be actively considered

*‘I think brothers and sisters should always stay in touch’*

Young adopted person

*‘Have as much sibling contact as you can. Without this we’d struggle to talk about them all I think. The families are becoming close friends now.’*

Adoptive parent

*‘If you have the chance to have direct contact with your child’s adopted birth siblings then go for it. Our sons have 5 adopted birth siblings between them (4 different families)—we think of them as our extended family and meet about 5 times a year----it means a lot to our sons and they love someone who looks like them.’*

Adoptive parent

*‘So we now have an ad hoc contact relationship with all 3 older girls and their Mums. We usually go to birthday parties and dramatic productions etc. We probably see each other about 5/6 times per year’*

Adoptive parent



- If direct contact cannot be arranged or sustained over time, keep the lines of communication open with siblings through remote and indirect contact

*‘I have worked with a family where letterbox contact works extremely well. The adopter and birth father (who has care of the half sibling) regularly send letters and cards, they also buy each other small gifts for birthdays and Christmas and send cards when they go on holiday. The benefits of this for each of the little boys is immense, they still have that connection and talking about each other becomes part of every day life.’*

Adoption social worker





## Contact with Grandparents

See 3.2 for a detailed look at the planning for contact with grandparents

See Appendix 9

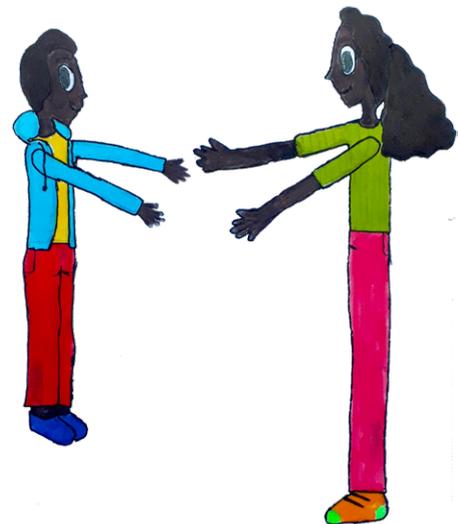
- Grandparents may have provided a more positive relationship for the child than birth parents. They may have even provided care that was not sustainable due to circumstances beyond their control (for example ill health). Information provided at the PLO stage (see 3.1) will provide a guide as to whether contact with grandparents will be sustaining for the child in their adoptive family
- Keeping up indirect or remote contact from the start can lead onto some direct contact in time

*'Post adoption contact for grandmothers is 'strikingly successful'*

Neil et al (2014)

*'Some of the information I learned and photos I saw made me feel like I was learning about myself. Where my nose came from, why I enjoy art so much.'*

Young person quoted in 'Contact After Adoption' page 15, talking about contact with grandparents



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This guide would not have been possible without the generosity and enthusiasm of the practitioners in the regions and VAA's for sharing such 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



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# 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.

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*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

# Appendix 3

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

### 3.1

S 34(1) Children Act 1989: Where a child is in the care of the local authority, the authority shall (subject to the provisions of this section and, where the local authority is in Wales, their duty under section 78(1)(a) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (i.e. the duty to 'safeguard and promote the child's well-being'), allow contact with

(a) his parents

The remaining parts of s34(4) apply to those with special guardianship orders, those with parental responsibility and those who had a child arrangement order before the interim Care Order or Care Order was made

During care proceedings there is, therefore, a duty to provide 'reasonable contact'. It is usual for parental contact to be the subject of a care contact order under s34(3). This order is automatically discharged with the making of the Placement Order.

S95 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:

#### Promotion and maintenance of contact between child and family

(1) Where a child is being looked after by a local authority, the authority must, unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's well-being, promote contact between the child and –

- (a) The child's parents,
- (b) Any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child, and
- (c) Any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

This duty applies to all looked after children, whether accommodated under s76 SSWB(W)A or subject to an interim Care Order (s38) or Care Order (s31) CA. s95(1)(c) will apply to siblings and to extended family members who are important to the child.

This duty continues to apply to children subject to a Placement Order as they remain 'looked after':

S18 (3) ACA 2002: A child who is placed or is authorised to be placed for adoption with prospective adopters by a local authority is looked after by the local authority.

### 3.2 PLACEMENT ORDER PROCEEDINGS

S26 Adoption and Children Act 2002:

- (1) On an adoption agency being authorized to place a child for adoption, or placing a child for adoption who is less than six weeks old, any provisions for contact under the 1989 Act ceases to have effect.
- (2) While an adoption agency is so authorised or a child is placed for adoption –
  - (a) No applications may be made for any provision for contact under that Act, but
  - (b) The court may make an order under this section requiring the person with whom the child lives, or is to live, to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, or for the person named in the order and the child otherwise to have contact with each other.

S27 (4) Before making a Placement Order the court must

- (a) Consider the arrangements which the adoption agency has made or proposes to make, for allowing any person contact with the child and
- (b) Invite the parties to the proceedings to comment on those arrangements

S1 (4) ACA: The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others) –

- (c) The likely effect on the child (throughout his life) of having ceased to be a member of the original family and become an adopted person,
- (f) The relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including – The likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of it doing so.

Once a Placement Order is made the provisions of s34 Children Act cease to apply and the provisions of s26 ACA take their place. S26 applies to the entire period from Placement Order, through placement with prospective adoptive parents, to the making of the Adoption Order.

The major difference between s34 CA and s26 ACA is that there is no longer a presumption of reasonable contact once the child is subject to a Placement Order. The Placement Order is signposting the child for an adoptive placement and so s26 contact performs a different function.

If a Placement Order is revoked, under s24 ACA, the child becomes subject to s34 Children Act 1989 once more and the LA's duty to provide reasonable contact with parents is reinstated.

S26 contact orders can be made upon an application to the court or upon the court's own initiative.

In planning for a Placement Order the child's social worker needs to consider two elements of contact:

- 3) The contact to take place during the course of the Placement Order, both before and after transitions and placement. S26 contact may take place up until the making of the Adoption Order
- 4) The contact to take place once the Adoption Order is made. This contact is rarely subject to an order (see below for more details).

It is very important to plan for these two very different types of contact separately and to make them clear in the care plan. The fact that contact is reduced and ceased under s26 during transitions and the early days of placement does not mean that there is an automatic assumption that no direct contact will continue once the Adoption Order is made:

It is not unusual for the court, when granting a Placement Order, to provide a timeframe within which family finding can take place, at the end of which the child's social worker must return to court, with a view to considering whether the plan for adoption for the child remains in their best interests and whether the local authority should make an application to revoke the Placement Order and change the child's permanency plan. See the NAS good practice guide on the ceasing of family finding.

Where it is in the child's best interests for there to be a level of direct contact with family members, including siblings, the child's social worker should inform the court of the possibility of family finding taking longer than usually anticipated, in order to identify prospective adoptive parents who are willing and prepared to facilitate and support that contact.



## 3.6

### Proposed placement

Reg 32(3) Where the adoption agency considers that the proposed placement should proceed the agency must –

- (a) consider the arrangements for allowing any person contact with the child;
- (b) ...
- (c) Prepare a written report which must include –
  - (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

### 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),

‘The paramount consideration of the court or adoption agency must be the child’s welfare, throughout his life’

(4)

The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others) –

- (a) The child’s ascertainable wishes and feelings regarding the decision (considered in the light of the child’s age and understanding);
- (b) ...
- (c) The likely effect of the child (throughout his life) of having ceased to be a member of the original family and become an adoptive person;
- (d) ...
- (e) ...
- (f) The relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including –
  - (i) The likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of its doing so,
  - (ii) The ability and willingness of any of the child’s relatives, or of any such person, to provide the child with a secure environment in which the child can develop, and otherwise meet the child’s needs,

(iii) The wishes and feelings of any of the child’s relatives, or of any such person, regarding the child.

and (5) of the Act (considerations applying to the exercise of powers in relation to the adoption of a child) and –

- (d) must consider and take into account all information and the reports passed to it in accordance with regulation 32
- (e) ...

### 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.

## 3.9

S25(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

## 3.12

S51A ACA Post Adoption Contact

(1) This section applies where –

- (a) An adoption agency has placed or was authorized to place the child for adoption, and
  - (b) The court is making or has made an Adoption Order in respect of the child.
- (2) When making the Adoption Order or at any time afterwards, the court may make an order under this section
- (a) Requiring the person in whose favour the Adoption Order is or has been made to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order under this section, or for the person named in that order and the child to otherwise have contact with each other, or
  - (b) Prohibiting the person named in the order under this section from having contact with the child.

Parents require the leave of the court to make an application for post adoption contact at the final adoption hearing stage (s51A (4)(c)).

However the court may make an order of its own motion prohibiting contact (s51A(6))

S1(4) ACA: The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others) –

- (d) The likely effect on the child (throughout his life) of having ceased to be a member of the original family and become an adopted person,
- (g) The relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including –
  - (i) The likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of it doing so.

S46(6) ACA:

Before making an Adoption Order, the court must consider whether there should be arrangements for allowing any person contact with the child; and for that purpose the court must consider any existing or proposed arrangements and obtain any views of the parties to proceedings

The most recent case law on post adoption contact, B (A Child: Post – Adoption Contact) [2019] EWCA Civ 29, held that, with the new provision for post adoption contact (s51A), which came into force with the Children and Families Act 2014,

‘...the court must be plain that, as the law stands, whilst there may be justification in considering some forms of direct contact, the ultimate decision as to what contact is to take place is for the adopters and that it will be ‘extremely unusual’ for the court to impose a contrary arrangement against the wishes of adopters.’

However: ‘...it must be a given that any social worker, children’s guardian or expert who is required to advise the court on the issue of contact, will ensure that they are fully aware of any current research and its potential impact upon the welfare issues in each particular case’.

The same judge, Lord Justice McFarlane, President of the Family Division, said in a speech in 2018:

‘I would encourage all those involved in adoption planning and decision making to focus more on the issue of contact and to ask, in each case, whether the model of life -story work and letterbox contact is in fact the best for the individual child in the years that lie ahead for her, or whether a more flexible and open arrangement, developed with confidence and over time, may provide more beneficial support as the young person moves on towards adolescence and then adulthood.’

### 3.13

#### S51A ACA Post Adoption Contact

(3) This section applies where –

- (c) An adoption agency has placed or was authorized to place the child for adoption, and
  - (d) The court is making or has made an Adoption Order in respect of the child.
- (4) When making the Adoption Order or at any time afterwards, the court may make an order under this section
- (c) Requiring the person in whose favour the Adoption Order is or has been made to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order under this section, or for the person named in that order and the child to otherwise have contact with each other, or
  - (d) Prohibiting the person named in the order under this section from having contact with the child.

Birth parents require the leave of the court to make an application for post adoption contact following an Adoption Order being made (s51A(4)(c)).

However the court may make an order of its own motion prohibiting contact (s51A(6))

S1(4) ACA: The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others) –

- (e) The likely effect on the child (throughout his life) of having ceased to be a member of the original family and become an adopted person,
- (h) The relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including –
  - (ii) The likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of it doing so.

# 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)

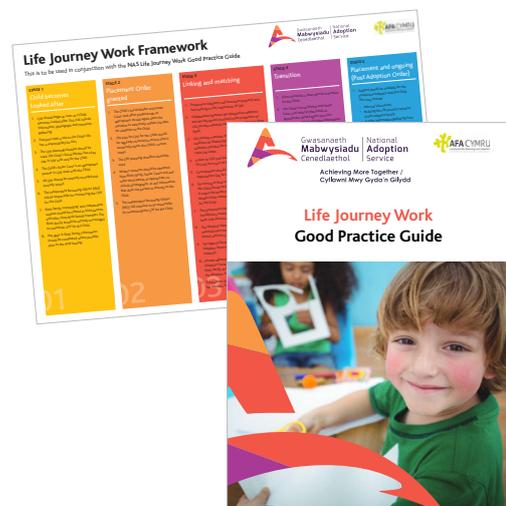
### LIFE JOURNEY BOOKS

*“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

## Post placement / Pre-Adoption Order agreement for contact with parents

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
(CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER)  
AND  
(REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL WORKER)  
AND  
(PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENT(S))**

This agreement is made with (PA's names) and sets out the expectations and agreement for contact between (child/ren) and (adoption agency) for the time period of the placement of (name(s) of child/ren) with them until such time as an Adoption Order is made.

(Prospective adopters) acknowledge that (adoption agency) has overriding parental responsibility for the child during the course of the placement and until the Adoption Order is made. Their agreement to the following is made upon the understanding that it is in (name of child/ren's name(s)) and their own new family's interests to keep in touch in the following ways: (delete as appropriate):

- 1) To meet with (name of child/ren's parents), as discussed with (adoption agency)
- 2) To send (parent(s)) a 'settling in letter' by (date)
- 3) To start letterbox contact (if the Adoption Order is not made yet) with (parent(s)) on (date) (explanation of the type of letterbox contact)
- 4) To encourage and facilitate (with support – details of who will do what) contact with (name of child/ren's parents (details of contact (skype / facetime / direct)
- 5) To encourage and facilitate (with support – details of who will do what) contact with (name of child/ren's relative(s)) (details, eg letterbox / skype / facetime / direct)
- 6) To participate in a review of contact / keeping in touch arrangements before the Adoption Order is made. This review will form part of the second statutory review. The prospective adoptive parents will have met with the child's social worker and adoption social worker in advance of the review to discuss and explore their views and plans for post adoption contact. These plans will then be agreed and recorded at the review itself.

The parents will be sent a corresponding letter setting out:

- 1) When they will receive a settling in letter
- 2) When indirect contact will start
- 3) When they can send indirect contact material (and who to contact for support in doing this)
- 4) An explanation that an agreement will be signed between them and adoptive parents for post adoption contact when the AO is made

Name .....  
(child's social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(family finding social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(prospective adopter(s)) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(manager – if additional resources needed) .....  
Date .....

# Appendix 6

## Post placement / Pre-Adoption Order agreement for contact with siblings

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN**  
**(CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER)**  
**AND**  
**(REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL WORKER)**  
**AND**  
**(PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENT(S))**  
**AND**  
**CARERS / ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF (SIBLING(S))**

This agreement is made with (PA's names) and sets out the expectations and agreement for contact between (child/ren) and (adoption agency) with (child's siblings) for the time period of the placement of (name(s) of child/ren) with them until such time as an Adoption Order is made.

(Prospective adopters) acknowledge that (adoption agency) has overriding parental responsibility for the child during the course of the placement and until the Adoption Order is made. Their agreement to the following is made upon the understanding that it is in (name of child/ren's name(s)) and their own new family's interests to keep in touch in the following ways:

(Delete as appropriate):

- 1) To meet with (child's siblings), as discussed with (adoption agency)
- 2) To send (sibling(s)) a 'settling in letter' by (date)
- 3) To start letterbox contact (if the Adoption Order is not made yet) with (sibling(s)) on (date) (explanation of the type of letterbox contact)
- 4) To encourage and facilitate (with support – details of who will do what) contact with (sibling(s)) (details of contact (skype / facetime / direct))
- 5) To participate in a review of contact / keeping in touch arrangements before the Adoption Order is made. This review will form part of the second statutory review. The prospective adoptive parents will have met with the child's social worker and adoption social worker in advance of the review to discuss and explore their views and plans for post adoption contact with (sibling(s)). These plans will then be agreed and recorded at the review itself.

(Sibling(s)) will be sent a corresponding letter setting out:

- 1) When they will receive a settling in letter
- 2) When indirect contact will start
- 3) When they can send indirect contact material (and who to contact for support in doing this)

Name .....  
(child's social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(family finding social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(prospective adopter(s)) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(carers or adoptive parents of sibling(s)) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(manager – if additional resources needed) .....  
Date .....

# Appendix 7

## Post-Adoption Order sibling contact agreement

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
(REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE)**

**AND**

**(ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF X)**

**AND**

**(ADOPTIVE PARENTS OF Y)**

**OR**

**(FOSTER CARERS / KINSHIP CARERS / SPECIAL GUARDIANS OF Y)**

This agreement sets out the arrangements for contact / keeping in touch between (X) and (Y), to be facilitated by their (respective) adoptive parents / foster carers.

The agreement to the following is made upon the understanding that it is in (child/ren's name(s)) to keep in touch in the following ways. It covers the time from the date of (X's) placement into the time when the Adoption Order has been made

(Delete as appropriate):

- 1) To exchange 'settling in' letters by (date)
- 2) To start letterbox contact (if the Adoption Order is not made yet, and beyond the Adoption Order) with each other on (date) (explanation of the type of letterbox contact)
- 3) To encourage and facilitate keeping in touch with (name(s)) by way of (details of contact (skype / facetime / direct)).
- 4) If direct contact, is there to be any support provided to help facilitate this? If so, details of that support
- 5) To participate in a review of contact / keeping in touch arrangements in (timescale)

Name .....  
(adoption support social worker) .....

Date .....

Name .....  
(adoptive parent(s)) .....

Date .....

Name .....  
(adoptive parents(s) / foster carer(s) .....  
(if foster carer endorsed by their support worker)

Date .....

Name .....  
(manager – if additional resources needed) .....

Date .....

# Appendix 8

## Post-Adoption Order agreement for contact with birth parents

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN**  
**((REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE)**  
**AND**  
**(NAME OF CHILD/REN'S ADOPTIVE PARENTS)**  
**AND**  
**(NAME OF CHILD/REN'S BIRTH PARENTS)**

This agreement is made with (adoption agency), (child/ren's names) adoptive parents and (child/ren's names) birth parents. It sets out the expectations and agreement for keeping in touch between (child/ren) and (name of birth parents) once the Adoption Order is made.

The agreement to the following is made upon the understanding that it is in (name of child/ren)'s interests to keep in touch in the following ways

(delete and expand as appropriate):

- 1) Expectations
- 2) What is agreed for now
- 3) When it will start
- 4) How is the contact to be supported by the AA/LA
- 5) How it will be reviewed
- 6) What will happen if the agreement is not kept to
- 7) Contacting the region if a significant event occurs

Name .....  
(social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(adoptive parent(s)) .....  
Signed 'adoptive parent' .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(birth parent(s)) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(manager – if additional resources needed) .....  
Date .....

# Appendix 9

## Post-Adoption Order agreement for contact with grandparents / other relatives

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
(REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE)  
AND  
(NAME OF CHILD/REN'S ADOPTIVE PARENTS)  
AND  
(NAME OF CHILD/REN'S GRANDPARENTS)**

This agreement is made with (adoption agency), (child/ren's names) adoptive parents and (child/ren's names) grandparents. It sets out the expectations and agreement for keeping in touch between (child/ren) and (name of grandparents) once the Adoption Order is made/ for the time period (date to date).

The agreement to the following is made upon the understanding that it is in (name of child/ren)'s interests to keep in touch in the following ways.

(Grandparents) agree to keep any information they might find out about the adoptive family that could lead to them being identified confidential and will not disclose this information to anyone.

(delete and expand as appropriate):

- 1) Expectations
- 2) What is agreed for now
- 3) When it will start
- 4) How is the contact to be supported by the AA/LA
- 5) How it will be reviewed
- 6) What will happen if the agreement is not kept to
- 7) Contacting the region if a significant event occurs

Name .....  
(social worker) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(adoptive parent(s)) .....  
Signed 'adoptive parent' .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(birth parent(s)) .....  
Date .....

Name .....  
(manager – if additional resources needed) .....  
Date .....

# Appendix 10

## Reflect guide to final contacts with parents

### FAREWELL CONTACTS.....BEFORE REFLECT SUPPORT

<b>STEP 1</b>	Matching panel approved and date for farewell contact is set. This Information is shared with Parents sometimes over the phone and at short notice e.g. less than a week.
<b>STEP 2</b>	Parents are informed that their contact time could be reduced as it is assumed that a longer period of contact will be too emotional for the parent. Parents are offered bus fare to transport themselves to the contact.
<b>STEP 3</b>	Some farewell contacts are double staffed. Some are just the parent and supervised contact worker.
<b>STEP 4</b>	Parents attend contact often on their own without any plan for what they would like to do in contact.
<b>STEP 5</b>	Some supervised contact workers support parents with practical tasks such as warming food and taking pictures but this is dependent on the worker.
<b>STEP 6</b>	Parent leaves farewell contact upset and on their own often having to use public transport.

### REFLECT SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AT FAREWELL CONTACTS

<b>STEP 1</b>	Matching panel approved and date for farewell contact is set. This Information is shared with Parents through a face to face visit. Identify who is the best person to share this information e.g. Joint visit with SW and Reflect Worker or Reflect worker on their own. Who would the parents say they want to hear this information from?
<b>STEP 2</b>	Reflect worker to meet with parents to discuss their wishes and feelings about their contact. Explore with parents what they would like to do in the contact.
<b>STEP 3</b>	Feedback to SW and Supervised contact team about Parents wishes and feelings and if appropriate agree how we can best meet these requests e.g. location of contact; size of room, Length of farewell contact; activities to carry out with their child.
<b>STEP 4</b>	Feedback to parents about what has been agreed.
<b>STEP 5</b>	Discussion with parents to consider the barriers they may face in achieving a meaningful contact and how we can overcome these. E.g. practicalities of ensuring they have enough food to eat; gas and electricity; credit on their phone to speak to people; enough medication; support to purchase items for the contact.
<b>STEP 6</b>	Reflect workers role in the contact is agreed with parents e.g. transporting parents to and from contact; supporting to warm up food, prepare the activity, take photographs. Anything to help maximise the Parents time with their child.
<b>STEP 7</b>	Wellbeing plan is established with parents for their self-care after the farewell contact. Wellbeing plan addresses who can be there for them after the contact? Do they want to be transported to a friend or family members home so they aren't alone? Discuss who could they visit or speak to? Provide a list of numbers they can contact if they want to speak to someone about how they are feeling. Discuss the idea of self-care and agree items they wish for in their bag that has a positive meaning to them. Ask parents if they wish for the photos you have taken to be sent to them that same day or another time?
<b>STEP 8</b>	Parents attend farewell contact with support from Reflect worker. Art and craft handprints activity takes place or a reading of a story book to their child. Photographs are taken which can be used to support parents to complete life story work for their child.
	These simple steps can make such a difference to parent's experiences of such a traumatic day and make it more bearable as they will feel more prepared and more in control.

# Appendix 11

## Explanation of the string exercise

The string exercise is helpful to support prospective adopters think about contact from a child's perspective. One participant holds the string and each person in the child's life at the point of coming into care is identified and holds the string. The exercise can then look at various point i.e. 6 months on, 2 years on etc and look at who the child has a connection with then. It gives a pictorial illustration of the losses a child who is adopted is likely to experience. This exercise is particularly helpful in looking at the position of grandparents.





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