



Education & Children's Services

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Moving from Foster Care to Adoption

This document is to be used to support the transition of children from their foster carers to their adoptive family.

This guide has been produced following consultation with foster carers, family based care team and adoption team.

PRINCIPLES

The first principle is that the child is at the centre of the process. It is essential to remember that this will be an experience of powerful emotions of grief and loss. The process of transition is accepted as being one that is often filled with emotion on the parts of all concerned and should be recognised as such.

A key element of a successful transition is the development of a constructive relationship between the two families involved. If this can be created the child is much more likely to be emotionally held in the process. Keeping the child emotionally held in mind is extremely important when making plans for a transition and is key to supporting the child during all the changes in their life.

Elements of a successful transition have been identified as:

1. Where there is a clear and detailed plan to ensure all parties know what is happening, when and what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. This should be discussed and agreed at the first coordination meeting to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities.

2. The plan should include a clear purpose of each day, for example having opportunities to observe each part of the child's daily routine and the undertaking of care tasks.
3. Planning can be flexible in line with changing needs and circumstances with the child's needs at the centre. All changes should be discussed with the child's social worker and/or the coordinator/reviewing officer.
4. Plans must not coincide with the child's birthday or be close to Christmas. These are emotional times for children and can trigger memories from their time with their birth families which may be positive or difficult. Sufficient time should be set aside before and after the child's birthday before commencing a significant move, especially for an older child. It is also important to ensure that there is staff availability and support during the Christmas holiday period.
5. For all those involved to be as prepared as they can be with support from social work staff. If foster carers are caring for other children, this needs to be considered in terms of their availability to focus on the transition.
6. Where there is acceptance from both sets of carers of their importance to the child.
7. Where foster carers give permission to the child and their adoptive parents to build the relationship between them with the aim being to transfer the feelings of safety and security.
8. Where support and time is set aside for reflection and sharing of emotions between foster carers, adoptive parents and their workers.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities of foster carers

1. Child's needs are at the centre
2. Recognition and understanding of the adopter's feelings
3. Provide information about the child and their routine to the adopters (refer to Adoption UK questionnaire).
4. With guidance/support from the child's social worker, help prepare the child for a transition and share the adopter's introduction book/video with the child
5. Provide information and photos for the life story book regarding the child's time with them. The child's red medical book and belongings should be given to the adopters. Arrangements can be made about how the belongings will be transferred prior to and during the transition in a manner that supports the child.
6. During the transition, support adopters to observe and learn and take over the caring tasks for the child.

Responsibilities of adopters

1. Child's needs are at the centre
2. Recognition and understanding of foster carer's feelings
3. Give due recognition to the routines of the child and the information supplied by the foster carer(s) to ensure continuity and consistency of care which is all familiar to the child.
4. Adhere to the plan for supporting relationships between the child and foster carer(s) after the move promoted through a range of indirect contact including visits, talking about the foster carer(s) and ensuring the child has a photograph of the foster carer(s).
5. To register the child with their local GP surgery and dentist in the child's new name
6. If the child is of nursery or school age there will be a clear agreement with the child's social worker about when the child should start nursery/school. The child must feel safe and secure within their new family and home before they can be expected to manage a further transition to a learning environment.
7. It is expected that the nursery aged child will spend ideally a minimum of 6 months with their adopter(s), before they start nursery, continuing to build their relationship.

8. It is expected that the school aged child will spend a minimum of 6 weeks with their adopter(s), before they start school, continuing to build their relationship.
9. It is recommended that the time is spent together at home (for example playing, baking, reading stories) and within the local community (for example taking shorts walks, visiting the park) will increase the child's sense of security and stability.
10. The child's social worker will arrange a meeting with the child's nursery/school so that everyone can carefully plan the transition. Visual aids (such as photos of the school, the classroom, the teacher etc.) to support the child can be effective.
11. It is expected that the child will not start any clubs and extracurricular activities until the child feels safe and secure within their adoptive family. This can be discussed with the child's social worker.
12. A 'settling in' letter about the child will be written for the birth parent(s) – further details are referenced below.

Responsibilities of Agencies

1. Child's needs are at the centre
2. Provide all information about the child and their birth family
3. Recognise the emotions of all involved and provide support regularly as appropriate
4. Mediate any changes to the transition plan.
5. There should be ongoing discussion with family-based care team and adoption team to allow for review of the transition process. Up-to-date research should be included and shared along with feedback from carers and adopters
6. Preparation groups for both foster carers and adopters should include discussions on transitions and include adopters and foster carers sharing their experiences with each other.
7. No changes should be made by any party unless there is discussion / negotiation via the child's social worker and/or the coordinator/reviewing officer.
8. The child's social worker will arrange a meeting with the child's nursery/school so that everyone can carefully plan the transition. Visual aids (such as photos of the school, the classroom, the teacher etc.) to support the child can be effective.

PROCESS

Stage 1 - Linking

1. A link is made from either within our own resources or through the Adoption Register
2. Child's profile is shared with the adopters
3. Child's paperwork and adopter's paperwork are shared with appropriate staff
4. Visit from child's social worker and adopter's social worker to adopter's home for internal placements
5. Visit from child's social worker and team leader or senior practitioner to adopter's home for external placements
6. De-brief and sharing of information and impressions from both staff and adopters
7. If both parties want to proceed an information day involving everyone who is involved with the child will be arranged by the child's social worker. Foster carers should be accompanied by their supervising social worker. Medical advisor, foster carer(s), and nursery/school staff attend this meeting. It may also be appropriate for short breaks carers and previous social worker's and/or contact supervisors to attend.
8. At the information day, a 'chemistry' meet between the child and the adopter(s) will be considered and may subsequently be arranged. Careful planning between the child's social worker and the foster carer is required. The meeting would include the foster carer and the child meeting with the adopter(s) in an environment known to the child or a child friendly venue such as the local park or soft play / quiet restaurant. It must not be in foster carer's home and only last around 30 mins. The purpose of the 'chemistry' meet is to ensure the match is as robust as possible and to prevent disruption.

If after this stage all parties feel this is the right family for the child a commitment is made to progressing the link/match. Further meetings with the child can take place prior to the matching panel, however this depends on several factors such as the stage of the child's legal plan and these meetings may not begin or progress until after the approval of the match. Please refer to Stage 2 for additional details.

9. A Linking meeting is arranged by the child's social worker and chaired by Adoption team leader. Foster carer(s) and supervising social worker should attend for first part of meeting. Adopters don't attend but are represented by their supervising social worker. During this meeting, the child's needs and how the adopters may meet these needs are fully explored.
10. Matching Panel is arranged by the child's social worker for recommended matches and panel require minutes from the information day, linking meeting and an updated report from the child's social worker.
11. Foster carers visit to adopter's home with staff supporting. The purpose of the visit is about getting to know each other, share further information about the child and to assist the foster carers in preparing the child for a move.

Stage 2 – Getting to Know Each Other (planned 'meet ups')

1. This stage refers to the period after the match and before the more intensive transition begins.
2. This stage could last from between 1 to 8 weeks however needs to be carefully considered and planned dependent on the stage of the child's legal plan.
3. The aim is a gradual familiarisation in which the child and adopters and the foster carers and the adopters get to know each other and build trust. This may include other children and pets in the adopters and foster carers immediate families however not on the first meet up.
4. The child's social worker will be responsible for preparing, sharing and coordinating a plan of 'meet ups' and the frequency of these. This is best achieved by inviting all those involved to a meeting in order to agree a timetable of meetings. Foster carers and adopters can exchange contact details at this point.
5. These 'meet ups' will ideally happen in a place that is familiar to the child, for example a park, child friendly restaurant with play area. The place should not be too busy.
6. 'Meet ups' should initially last for approximately 1 hour and this be increased as the plan progresses (or shortened depending on the child's needs on the day).

7. The child's social worker will discuss what the adopters should be called during these meetings to ensure the child is not confused at this point or at a later stage when the transition begins.
8. The adopters should focus on enjoying time with the child and getting to know them. No care tasks such as nappy changing, feeding etc are involved at this stage.
9. The child's social worker should seek an update from the foster carer and adopters following each meet up in order to ascertain how the child is responding and how the adopters are feeling.

Stage 3 - Transition

1. Following the matching panel and the Agency Decision Maker's decision a co-ordinator will be appointed to chair the process. Timescales may be dependent on legal process
2. An initial co-ordination will be arranged together involving all parties
3. The roles and responsibilities of the social worker for the child, adopter(s) and foster carers will be clarified.
4. Everyone's contact details (mobile phones and/or email addresses) will be shared to aid effective communication during the transition and following placement.
5. A plan will be agreed regarding the timetable and purpose of visits and share expectations
6. A second co-ordination meeting should take place midway through the transition and just prior to the move of the visits to the adopter's home. It is important to consider that the child and adopter(s) are ready for the next part of the transition.

Usually the transition would last between 8 and 14 days. The length of time can depend on if there have been previous meet ups. The transition is an intense period with the adopter(s) and child having daily contact. The adopter(s) shall spend time in the foster carers home and then the child and foster carer spend time in the adopter's home.

The foster carer(s) remain physically and psychologically available for the child during this time but increasingly take more of a back seat as the adopter's confidence grows and the child learns that the new parents will meet their needs.

Stage 4 – Following the Child’s Move

The suggested format for foster carers’ visits to the child at the adopter’s family home is at the following intervals:

- 1-2 days
- 5-7 days
- 2 weeks
- Thereafter based on child’s individual needs.

The following information also should be considered:

1. There will be a visit to the foster carer by the child’s social worker and their supervising social worker at the end of the process. This will allow for a sharing of experiences and feelings about the move.
2. The child’s social worker should ensure the adopter(s) have a copy of the child’s birth certificate.
3. The child’s social worker will visit the child in their new family within 7 days of the move. They will agree a visiting pattern with the adopter’s social worker.
4. Notifications will be sent by the child’s social worker within the first 6 weeks of the move – please refer to operational guidance.
5. A third coordination meeting will be held in approximately 6 weeks after the move. This takes place in the adopter’s home.
6. Around 3 months following the move, the adoptive family will write a letter to the child’s birth parent(s) to offer information about how the child was supported to move and his/her progress so far. This is key to paving the way to future indirect contact. Further information about the benefits and an exemplar letter can be accessed via:
<https://contact.rip.org.uk/topics/letterbox-contact/>

7. A Life Story book and Adoption Support Plan in line with the child's changing needs will be completed by the child's social worker.