**Newham Policy and Procedure: Permanence for Children**

 Date of publication: 30th September 2020

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Related Chapter Early Permanence Placements –RAA

Refer to Permanence Options Grid

**AMENDMENT**This chapter was updated in September 2020 in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and revised statutory guidance.

These changes relate to the status of ‘previously looked after children’. A previously Looked After Child is one who is no longer looked after in England and Wales because they are the subject of an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order which includes arrangements relating to with whom the child is to live, or when the child is to live with any person, or has been adopted from ‘state care’ outside England and Wales.

Children subject to an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order are entitled to support from their school, through the Designated Teacher.
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**Newham Permanence Policy statement**

**1. Introduction**

**1.1** Newham is committed to ensuring that all children are given the opportunity to live safely and securely in a family. Where this cannot be achieved within birth families, we will, through effective assessment and child care planning, ensure that alternative families are found to meet the needs of each child as speedily as possible.

**1.2** Newham’s permanency policy is based on the principles set out in Section 2. It incorporates the National Adoption Standards and Regulations for England and the principles and values contained in the Children Act s1989 and 2004, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**1.3** At all stages, children must have the opportunity to belong and feel safe in a permanent family.Their wishes and feelings taken into account;Their contact arrangements with their birth family clarified, including plans for reviewing the arrangements;Their life story and history developed and direct work undertaken to establish a narrative to help children and young people develop their identity and a description of their circumstances to established family and friends and new carers. Support services available to meet their assessed needs;Readily available assistance in the event of difficulties or placement breakdown;Information about how to make complaints or representations if required and how to access advocacy services.
**2. Policy and Principles of the Policy**

**2.1** It is the fundamental right of every child to belong and feel safe in a family;Every child must have his or her wishes and feelings listened to, recorded and taken into account in decision making and planning;Every effort must be made to recruit sufficient permanent families from diverse backgrounds to meet children's needs;Every effort must be made to find families that reflect the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of the children concerned;Every effort must be made to allow children to live with their siblings unless this is not in their assessed best interests;Every effort must be made to ensure that, where possible and appropriate, links between the children and their birth families are maintained.

**2.2** Where children cannot live with their birth or extended family, there is a duty to provide an alternative permanent home. This must be within a family environment unless there are significant needs that cannot be met within a family placement.

**2.3** Every child is a unique individual and their individuality must be taken into account when planning all aspects of their needs, identity and wishes.

**2.4** Sibling groups must be placed together unless there are clear indications that this is not in the interest of the individual child and/or a placement could not be achieved within a reasonable time-scale.

**2.5** Staff must attempt to work in partnership wherever possible with the child’s birth and extended family, to ensure the long term wellbeing of the child in their permanent placement.

**2.6** All children must have a permanency plan that reflects contingency arrangements at the first point of assessment and planning, where a decision has been made that they cannot live with their birth or extended family.

**2.7** Adoption or Special Guardianship must be considered as the preferred option for all looked after children under 12 years needing permanent homes. However age should not be a limitation to any child achieving permanence and therefore these options should be considered for any child if appropriate to their circumstances.

**2.8** When a child is placed in a permanent alternative home through adoption, fostering or by means of a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangements Order, an assessment must be made of their need for continued support, to ensure the future stability of the placement.

**2.9** Contingency and Parallel Planning must be applied for children where an assessment has identified that their parents may be unlikely to achieve or sustain the necessary changes in their parenting on their children’s behalf.**3. Key Objectives in Permanence Planning**

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Every reasonable effort to prevent drift and delay for children or young people and to support children to move out of the care system wherever possible and appropriate. Decisions need to be taken quickly as possibilities for reunification decrease markedly after four months, and the younger child, at placement, the greater likelihood of him or her developing good attachments throughout childhood and into adulthood.The question "how the child’s permanence are needs being met?" must be at the core of all work undertaken.

**3.1** Where it is necessary for a child to leave his or her family:This should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home; orif a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternate permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs; Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured through adoption, long term foster care, Child Arrangements Orders or Special Guardianship Orders; Residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate. Some older children and notably those with severe disabilities may require a specialist residential facility. Whilst this is often a long term provision it should not be regarded as permanent and plans should include how the child can be live within the community and experience family life for at least some of the time. Supporting shared care arrangements with family and connected persons where an assessment has evidenced the circumstances in which this can happen with the appropriate care and support plan in place. The right to family life is our guiding principle and shared care arrangements should only be considered for specific time limited circumstances where that is in the best interest of a child / children.

**3.2** For older children arranging for their independent living must be considered.Where it is clear that families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings.Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate.Contact with the family and extended family should be facilitated and built on (unless clearly identified as inappropriate). It is important to also consider any unregulated or semi-independent placements as a bridge to independence and for some young people this is the most suitable permanence option. The professionals involved will work in partnership with parents/families to meet the above objectives. The wishes and feelings of the child will be taken into account. The older and more mature the child, the greater the weight should be given to his or her wishes.

**3.3** When undertaking permanence planning, all workers have a duty to promote the child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage by:Wherever possible promoting placements enabling the child to be brought up within the same racial, cultural and religious environment as his birth family;The identified placement does not have to be a cultural and racial match if the identified adopters are able to meet the child’s needs (Pg. 84 of Chapter 4 revised Adoption Act Guidance Feb 2011);Identifying a placement which will promote links for the child's race, culture and religion, if the above is not possible.Practice promoting race equality according to the child's assessed needs must therefore be evidenced within the child or young person’s plan.
**4. Delivering Permanence**

The service will strive to deliver the commitments outlined in this policy by providing the following:High quality and timely assessments of a child's needs; any assessment of the child/young person’s experience will always refer to the factors outlined in the principles as outlined above. This will help to ensure appropriate planning and the focus of practice to best help the child/young person achieve as strong a sense of permanence as possible.

Clear plans; with identifiable outcomes, service provision and actions to meet those needs; Multi-agency commitment and effective joint working processes to ensure that the services necessary to support children in permanent family placements and / or prevent their breakdown are prioritised and delivered; Where there are concerns that a child may not be able to remain with their birth parents without statutory intervention a family group conference will be held at the earliest opportunity to fully explore the options for the child to remain safely within the extended kinship network; Robust case reviewing arrangements for the early identification of the need for permanent arrangements and to prevent drift; The opportunity for the voice of the child to be heard and their lived experiences, evidenced in the plan and to include their views and feelings; Effective communication pathways to ensure that family, carers and other individuals that the child considers to be an important part of their life are able to express their needs and feelings and are aware of the plans for the child and their role in these plans where appropriate; Policies and services that support all children placed within the range of permanence options; The permanence panel will consider all plans for permanence following the 4 month review. The panel will review and have oversight on proposals regarding matches for long term fostering and special guardianship arrangements. The panel will consider significant changes of care plan and will review Section 20 arrangements on a regular basis. This will ensure effective oversight and monitoring of all plans for permanency for children and young people.

**Permanence planning must include the following:**

* A timetable for introducing the child to the placement that ensures that both child and carers have a mutual understanding and commitment to the move;
* If the plan is for a residential placement, the desired aims, objectives and outcomes of the placements must be clarified;
* Plans for life story and more specific therapeutic work to take place before and after the placement;
* Arrangements for contact, if appropriate, that are based on the needs of the child and the priority of achieving stability and permanence in their lives.

**6. Permanence and Local Placement**

Where a child is placed with long term carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends, family or community within which they were brought up and which form part of their identity their long term support network. For these reasons children should be placed in local provision wherever possible in order to provide a wraparound service locally.Any decision to place a child away from their community should be based on the particular needs of the child, considered within the context of a Permanence Plan.Where an alternative family placement is sought in the area of another local authority, the likely availability and cost of suitable local resources to support the placement must be explored. In the case of an adoptive placement, this will be required as part of the assessment of need for adoption support services but should be carried out in relation to any permanent placement.
**7. Permanence Outcomes and Parallel Planning**

The emphasis on early consideration of permanency plans and avoidance of drift has led to the development of parallel planning for children, where efforts are made to rehabilitate but the necessary information is gathered ready to put in place an alternative plan e.g. adoption, if this fails. Social workers are expected to work to this model; working towards a child's return home where appropriate, whilst at the same time developing alternative Permanence Plans, within strictly limited timescales. Where children's cases are before the court in Care Proceedings, the Court require twin track or parallel planning to be reflected in the permanence plan.

**8. Permanence Options**

There are various options to consider in a planning for permanence for a Child Looked After and young person. Achieving each type of permanence will present different challenges for all parties.It will depend upon:

* The capacity of the parents/carer to understand and meet the needs of the child;
* The level of attachment the child experiences with their parent/carer;
* The quality of the intervention and support provided by professionals working with the child and their family;
* The level of cooperation of all involved in the permanence planning.

Consideration needs to be given to the degree of control granted to the caregiver and the degree in which parental responsibility is apportioned or delegated. The options also affect the support and the type of support carers can expect from The London Borough of Newham in the longer term.

The following provides a summary of each permanence option information about the relevant support, financial support available legal orders regarding each option.

**8.1 Reunification/Staying at Home**

**8.1** Staying at home offers the best chance of stability for children and efforts in working with the parent(s) and family about family are the first line of approach as long as there is no risk of harm to the child(ren); Where a child cannot remain safely at home and intervention is necessary which means that the child(ren) is received into care then the focus of work should be on reunification; For reunification to be successful research shows that a number of factors are relevant to achieve a safe and  appropriate return:

* Thorough multi agency assessments;
* Good support identified from extended network of family and /or friends including the use of Divert! services.
* Clear written expectations have been set for the parent(s) to meet before the child could return home and within what timescales;
* Problems which led to the admission to care have been addressed;
* Return to other parent or parent has a new partner who makes a difference;
* Appropriate support plan and any specialist support has been provided  parents engage with this;
* There is good preparation of parent(s) and child(ren), including life story work;Good monitoring of the child(ren) before  after return.

If a child is subject to care proceedings and Interim Care Order and the assessment work indicates that reunification should be attempted, then:Wherever possible, time within the care proceedings should be used for this;Placement with Parent regulations **(**Placements with Parents Procedure) should be used to support placement at home with parent(s) if subject to interim care orders;If, at the final hearing in the care proceedings, it is proposed that the plan for permanency should be for the child(ren) to live with a parent or parents then proportionate use of the court orders available should be used, including use of supervision order or no order where safe and appropriate to do to so;

The key point is to ensure that arrangements are in place to provide multi agency support the parent(s) and child(ren) through a clear and appropriate plan;

As part of a step down approach then if there is a Child in Need plan or if a supervision order is in place then the plan and support should be reviewed and chaired independently other than by the allocated social worker; CAFCASS officer and the Independent Reviewing Officer should be kept informed about plans to step down from interim care orders as part of the reunification plan.It will be necessary to ensure that there is Parallel Planning alongside efforts in reunification so that alternatives for care, e.g. possible solutions provided through the Family Group Conference or adoption are also considered;For reunification with parents, if there is a Care Order, the plan may involve consideration of discharging the Care Order if it is appropriate to do so.Support available to enable this permanence option:

* A clearly written support plan including support from within the family - this is multi-agency support identified through a Child in Need plan; Newham Council has the discretion to provide support on a one-off or regular basis under Section 17 Children Act 1989 -  Child in Need support.
* Available legal orders to support this permanence option:Supervision Order;Financial Assistance Order; Section 8 Order Children Act 1989. For further information

Reunification – An Evidence Informed Framework for Return Home Practice (NSPCC, 2015)

**8.2 Placements with Kinship Carers / Family and Friends Carers**

When a child cannot safely return to their birth parents then every effort must be made to seek a placement with relatives or friends. It is very important to establish at the earliest possible stage of a child coming into care which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, in order to avoid delays in planning for permanence.  A  Family Group Conference should always take place prior to a planned entry into care. Research indicates that children can have increased commitment from kinship carers in providing stability and have an enhanced opportunity to develop their identity. However, research also states that good assessments of kinship carers need to be completed in order to assess the quality of the care to be provided as this leads to better outcomes for children. Placements need to be well supported as kinship carers are often older, have poorer health and have less support than foster carers.Routes to permanence for children placed with kinship carers need to be considered at an early stage. If children are not able to return to their birth families, ideally their placement within the extended family or with friends would be supported by a Child Arrangements Order or a Special Guardianship Order or through adoption. It would be unusual for children to remain on Care orders when placed safely with relatives and for the carers to remain therefore as formal kinship foster carers. The Local Authority would want to normalise the child’s living arrangement should they remain with them and would be supporting an alternative order and support plan to ensure they do not remain looked after if appropriate. Contact in kinship arrangements can often be more complex and this needs to be addressed in the Care Plan. Often a Supervision Order may assist kinship carers in feeling supported during the first year of a kinship placement, rather than the child remaining on a care order.

Support available to enable this permanence option:A clear support plan including support from within the family;A range of multi-agency support as outlined in the Kinship Care Family and Friends Care Policy ;Newham Council has the discretion to provide support on a one-off or regular basis under Section 17 Children Act 1989 -  Child in Need supportAvailable legal orders to support this permanence option:

* Child Arrangements Order;
* Special Guardianship Order;
* Supervision Order;
* Adoption Order.

**8.3 Adoption**

In many cases where a child cannot safely be cared for by their birth parents the permanence plan is that of adoption. Newham is committed to adoption as a legal and emotional permanence option which can be considered for all children. Newham is part of Adopt East Regional Adoption Agency.

Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor contributing to the stability of children and has good outcomes.

Adoption transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the local authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s). The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if they had been born to them and the child takes on the surname of the adoptive parent. The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK. This legal status applies into adulthood and is therefore a lifelong legal commitment, unlike any other legal permanence options.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and a comprehensive support service will be provided in partnership with other agencies. Adopters may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made. Adoption Support Procedure for detailed procedures. A child subject to an Adoption Order will be entitled to additional education and Early Years support. This will be accessed through the designated teacher in the child's school/Early Years setting. The expectation is that contact is maintained with siblings placed separately and some form of contact will be maintained with the birth family throughout the child’s life depending on the circumstances. Research indicates that openness in adoption is key in adoptive placements and offers continuity when contact is not possible.

The service is committed to preventing delay for children and supports fostering for adoption where appropriate in order to prevent delay for the child. Family finding should begin as soon as adoption is under consideration, and before the Agency Decision Maker decides that the child should be placed for adoption or a Placement Order is made.

Support available to enable this permanence option:A clear multi-agency support plan;See Adoption Support Procedure for the range of support available, including financial support.Available legal orders to support this permanence option:Adoption Order.

**8.4 Early Permanence Placements / Fostering for Adoption**

The Children and Families Act 2014 imposes a duty to consider placements with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers and where a child is placed in a fostering for adoption placement, the relationship which the child has with the person who is a prospective adopter must be considered by the Court or Adoption Agency alongside other relevant relationships the child has with their relatives or other persons.Section 9 Children and Social Work Act 2017 amends Section 1(f) Adoption and Children Act 2002

**8.5 Special Guardianship (SGO)**

Special Guardianship provides an alternative legal status for children, and provides greater security than long term fostering, but without the absolute legal severance from the birth family that stems from an Adoption Order. It is a legal route to permanence for children for whom adoption is not appropriate.

The Special Guardian will have parental responsibility for the child and may exercise this to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility, apart from another Special Guardian. There are exceptions to the decisions a Special Guardian can make, for instance they cannot change the child’s surname or take them out of the country without the permission of the court or the agreement of all of the people with parental responsibility. The birth parents also retain the right to consent or not to adoption.

Special Guardians may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made. Special Guardianship Orders Procedure for detailed procedures. The level and extent of support needed should be established by undertaking a formal assessment at the point of the completion of the Schedule 21 court report.

Support available to enable this permanence option:A clear multi-agency support plan;See Special Guardianship Orders Procedure for the range of support available, including financial support.Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

* Special Guardianship Order;
* Supervision Order;
* Section 8 Orders.

**8.6 Child Arrangements Orders**

Child Arrangements Orders were introduced in April 2014 by the Children and Families Act 2014 (which amended Section 8 Children Act 1989). They Contact Orders and Residence Orders.A Child Arrangements Order is a court order regulating arrangements relating to any of the following:With whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact; and when a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with any person.

The 'residence' aspects of a Child Arrangements Order (i.e. with whom a child is to live/when a child is to live with any person) can last until the child reaches 18 years unless discharged earlier by the Court or by the making of a Care Order.

The ‘contact’ aspects of a Child Arrangements Order (with whom and when a child is to spend time with or otherwise have contact with) cease to have effect when the child reaches 16 years, unless the court is satisfied that the circumstances of the case are exceptional.

A person named in the Order as a person with whom the child is to live, will have Parental Responsibility for the child while the Order remains in force. Where a person is named in the Order as a person with whom the child is to spend time or otherwise have contact, but is not named in the Order as a person with whom the child is to live, the court may provide in the Order for that person to have Parental Responsibility for the child while the Order remains in force.

Child Arrangements Orders are private law orders, and cannot be made in favour of a local authority. Where a child is the subject of a Care Order, there is a general duty on the local authority to promote contact between the child and the parents. A Contact Order can be made under Section 34 of the Children Act 1989 requiring the local authority to allow the child to have contact with a named person.A court which is considering making, varying or discharging a Child Arrangements Orders, including making any directions or conditions which may be attached to such an Order, must have regard to the paramountcy principle, the ‘no order’ principle and the welfare checklist under the Children Act 1989.Interim Child Arrangements Orders can be made.

Where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, a placement with family or friends/Connected Persons may be identified as a preferred option and the carers may be encouraged and supported to apply for a Child Arrangements Orders where this will be in the best interests of the child.

The holder of a Child Arrangements Order does not have the right to consent to the child's adoption nor to appoint a guardian; in addition, they may not change the child's name nor arrange for the child's emigration without the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility or the leave of the court.

Whilst support may continue for as long as the Child Arrangements Order remains in force, the aim will be to make arrangements which are self-sustaining in the long run.

Any person can apply for a Child Arrangements Order. The following can apply for a Child Arrangements Order without needing the leave of the court. In addition, any person who is not automatically entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order may seek leave of the court to do so:Any parent (whether or not they have Parental Responsibility for the child), guardian or Special Guardian of the child;Any person named, in a Child Arrangements Order that is in force with respect to the child, as a person with whom the child is to live;Any party to a marriage (whether or not subsisting) in relation to whom the child is a child of the family. This allows step-parents (including those in a civil partnership) and former step-parents who fulfil this criteria to apply as of right;Any person with whom the child has lived for a period of at least 3 years - this period need not be continuous but must not have begun more than 5 years before, or ended more than 3 months before, the making of the application; orAny person:Who has the consent of each of the persons in named in a Child Arrangements Order as a person with whom the child is to live;In any case where the child is in the care of a local authority, who has the consent of that authority;In whose favour a Child Arrangements Order has been made in relation to the ‘contact’ aspects and who has been awarded Parental Responsibility by the court (i.e. they would be able to apply for a Child Arrangements Order in relation to the ‘residence’ aspects);Who has the consent of everyone with parental responsibility for the child.A local authority foster carer is entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order relating to with whom the child is to live, and/or when the child is to live with that person, if the child has lived with them for a period of at least 1 year immediately preceding the application;A relative of a child is entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order relating to with whom the child is to live, and/or when the child is to live with that person, if the child has lived with the relative for a period of at least 1 year immediately preceding the application. (A relative is a child's grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full or half blood), or by marriage or civil partnership.)A Child Arrangements Order specifying with whom the child is to live has the following advantages:It gives Parental Responsibility to the carer whilst maintaining the parents' Parental Responsibility;The child will no longer be Looked After and there need be no social work involvement, therefore, unless this is identified as necessary;

There is no review process;The child will not be Looked After and so less stigma is attached to the placement;A child subject to a Child Arrangements Order will be entitled to additional education support throughout their school career.A Child Arrangements Order has the following disadvantages:It is less secure than Adoption or Special Guardianship in that an application can be made to revoke the Order. However, the Court making the Order can be asked to attach a condition refusing a parent's right to seek revocation without leave of the court;There is no formal continuing support to the family after the Order is made although in some instances, a Child Arrangements Order Allowance may be payable by the local authority;There is no professional reviewing of the arrangements after the Order unless a new application to court is made, for example by the parents for contact or revocation. (N.B. New applications to court may be expensive to defend, and the carers would have to bear the cost if not entitled to assistance with legal costs).

**8.7 Long Term Fostering**

Placements in Foster Care for details regarding the appropriate making of long-term foster placements).For those children who remain Looked After an important route to permanence is long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is longer-term foster care this may be where the current short-term foster placement is assessed to meet the long term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for a child as a result of an assessment and matching process.

This option has proved to be particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority.

Long-term fostering has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:The local authority retains a role in negotiating between the foster carers and the birth family over issues such as contact;There is continuing social work support to the child and foster family in a placement that is regularly reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are met;It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the decision making for the child.Long-term fostering has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan: Parental Responsibility and this may delay or complicate decision making;Continuing social work involvement can be an intrusion into the child experiencing ‘family life’;Regular Looked after Reviews, which, can, sometimes, be regarded as an intrusion in a long standing and stable placement;Stigma attached to the child due to being in care;The child is not a legal member of the family. If difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere and seek resolution;Post care and/or post 18 the carers have no legal responsibility towards the young person.Support available to enable this permanence option:A clear plan of support as outlined in the care plan and the placement and support plan. This should be reviewed regularly at the child’s care review;The foster carer will have an allocated supervising social worker from the fostering service and will have access to a range of support and training;Weekly allowance is paid to meet the costs of caring for the child;Foster carer payment is paid according to the Payment for Skills Mechanism;For those children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) the costs for the child’s placement are agreed between the IFA and Newham Council and confirmed on the Individual Placement Agreement (IPA).Available legal orders to support this permanence option: Care Order.

**8.8 Permanence and Residential Care**

For most children a placement in residential care should be identified in their care plan as a short term transition with the aim of preparing, enabling and supporting the child to return to live in a family setting. Long term residential care may better meet the needs of small numbers of children and young people and lead to better outcomes if it is a clear decision is made on assessed needs.

The needs of older children and young people must be considered in relation to achieving permanence in their lives. Some young people may not be able to live with birth parents, nor wish to be in a foster home but prefer to live in a residential children’s home. However, the care planning process must identify adults such as wider family and friends or other connected people who can provide a long term trusting relationship and emotional support and which will provide continuing support, particularly during periods of transition.

Research states that good quality work with families can help the young person build bridges back to their parents or other family members who may be able to provide that support even though it is not possible for the young person to live at home for a period of time. It is important to also consider any unregulated or semi-independent placements as a ‘step down’ or bridge to independence and for some young people this is the most suitable permanence option.

It is essential to support young people to make the transition towards independence with the provision of high quality leaving care support and early transition planning.

**9. Contact with Birth Family Members and Others**

Contact must always be for the benefit of the child and not the parent or other relatives. Plans for contact must be included in the permanence plan.Contact may take place with birth parents, siblings and other people who help the child maintain and enhance their identity.

**10. Supporting reunification with birth or extended family**Research points to:The importance of clearly communicating to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and within what timescales;The importance of exploring family ties and long term relationships with family, school and community;The use of Family Group Conferences (FGC) as an effective way of facilitating both the above. It is an expectation that all families will be offered and supported to make use of a FGC to consider the permanency plans for children.

**10.1 Identifying the best permanence option**

The permanency planning process, informed by multi-agency contributions, will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child, taking account of their wishes and feelings.

**Issues to consider:**The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved;

Long term stability means the sense of a permanent home with the same family or group of people, as part of the same community and culture, and with long-term continuity of relationships and identity;

Short or medium term stability or continuity will be important for children who are going to stay in care for a brief period before going home and for children who are going to need new permanent arrangements. The quality of a child's attachments and life will be detrimentally affected by uncertainties, separations from what /who is known and changes of school and placement;

Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support to carers, contribute to guarding against disruption and placement breakdown;

The importance of carefully listening to what children want from the placement, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around contact with family, providing vigorous support during crisis times and taking a sufficiently flexible attitude to adoption by carers;

The older a child is, the less likely it is that the child will secure a permanent family through adoption;The larger the family group of children, the harder it is to secure a single placement that will meet all the needs of all the children.

**10.2 Parallel Planning**Social workers are encouraged to consider working to this model; working towards a child's return home whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within strictly limited timescales.

Where children's cases are before the court in Care Proceedings, the Court require twin track planning to be reflected in Care and Supervision Proceedings and the Public Law Outline. It is the expectation that social workers run parallel plans whilst further assessment are completed, and that ahead of children becoming looked there is a focus on these assessment being identified and underway so the time for a child being looked after is reduced. See also Early Permanence Placements-(link to RAA).

**10.3 Placement/Contact with Siblings - Issues to Consider**Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together. Being able to live with brothers and sisters who are also Looked After is an important protective factor for many Looked After children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person’s life, such as leaving care.

A number of factors however, can mitigate against achieving the positive placement of brothers and sisters together – they may have entered care at different times and/or they may have very different needs related to past experiences, current emotional and behavioural development and age, especially where there are significant age differences. There may be practical difficulties in accommodating large sibling groups together. In some circumstances a child may have been abused by a brother or sister. An understanding of family functioning and family history, providing appropriate support to all parties, as well as listening to the wishes and feelings of children, is therefore key to informing these judgements.

There are often some practical steps that can be taken to overcome some of the more logistical reasons for being unable to place sibling groups together. Where siblings placed together in foster care may be separated when one turns 18, consideration should be given to whether Staying Put arrangements may be beneficial for all the children involved.

There will, however, always be circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together and children should be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings. In these circumstances where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling contact should be promoted and maintained.

If it is likely that brothers and sisters who are not able to be placed together at the start of a care episode will remain Looked After for the medium to long term, arrangements should be made as part of each child’s Care Plan which will enable brothers and sisters to live together, taking into account the other factors.

Where the plan is for adoption, in order to reduce delay, an early decision should be taken as to whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child. Factors that may need to be considered will include: the nature of the sibling group (do the siblings know each other/ how are they related); whether the children have formed an attachment; the health needs of each child; and each child’s view (noting that a child’s views and perceptions will change over time).

**10.4 Direct contact with birth family members and others**

Contact must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.It may serve one or all of the following functions:To maintain a child's identity. Consolidating the new with the old;To provide reassurance for the child;To provide an ongoing source of information for the child;To give the child continuing permission to live with the adoptive family;To minimise the sense of loss;To assist with the process of tracing;To give the adopters a secure sense of the right to parent. This will make the parenting task easier.

**Direct contact will generally work best if all parties accept/agree to:**The plan for permanence. The parental role of the permanent carers;The benefit of contact;The adoptive parents being present.Direct contact is not likely to be successful in situations where a parent:Disagrees with the plan for permanence. Does not accept the parental role of the permanent carer and their own minimal role with the child;Has proved to be unreliable in their commitment to contact in the past;Does not have a significant attachment with the child.The wishes of the child to join a new family without direct contact, must be considered and given considerable weight at any age.If direct contact is a part of the Permanence Plan, a formal agreement setting out how contact will take place, who with, where and how frequently must be negotiated before placement, and reviewed regularly throughout the child's life.

**10.5 Indirect contact with birth family members and others**

We do not all share the same sense of family - it means different things to different people. It helps when children are helped to understand to whom they are related, especially if they have complicated family trees including half-brothers or sisters living in different places. Identity is built on solid information.Wherever possible, indirect contact between the child and their new family with people from the past should be facilitated:

To leave open channels of communication in case more contact is in the child's interests in the future;To provide information (preferably two-way) to help the child to maintain and enhance their identity and to provide the birth relative with some comfort in knowing of the child's progress.Indirect contact must be negotiated prior to placement, and all parties should be asked to enter into an agreement with one another about the form and frequency that the contact will take.

Renegotiations of the contact should only take place if the child's needs warrant it.

All parties to the agreement will need to accept that as the child becomes older and is informed more fully about the arrangements for indirect contact, the child will have a view regarding its continuation. No contact arrangements can be promised to remain unaltered during the child's childhood. Those involved need to accept that contact may cease if it is no longer in the child's interests. Alternatively, an older child may need to change to direct contact.

**10.6 Clearly communicating the Permanence Plan**

Communicating a Permanence Plan effectively involves setting it out clearly and concisely as part of the Care Plan, in a way that acts as a useful reference to all involved during the Review process;Good quality Care Plans set out clear, concise statements about intended outcomes;Make timescales clear.

**10.7 Legal routes to Permanence**

For younger children unable to be returned home where adoption is the plan, a Care Order and Placement Order are likely to be necessary unless parents are clearly relinquishing the child and are in agreement with the plan and the placement choice. For children for whom adoption is not appropriate, each case will need to be considered on its merits. The decision between Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order and Long Term Fostering under a Care Order will depend on the individual needs of the child set alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each legal route.

**Guidance Direct Work and Life Story Work**

This guidance covers direct work and life story work with children and young people. It includes when life story work should begin for children and young people where adoption or long term fostering has been identified, who should undertake it, what should be covered and when the life story book should be transferred to the adopters (the general guidance will apply to all permanence options further specific guidance is in development for other permanence options.)
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* Principles of Direct Work and Life Story Work with Children and Young People
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Appendix A: Principles of Direct Work and Life Story Work with Children and Young People

Appendix B: Understanding and Telling Appendix C: Checklist for Life Story Work
**1. Introduction**Supporting Children and Young People through the process of expressing their thoughts and feelings, understanding what is happening to them and their family as part of Children’s Services involvement and what will happen to them in the future should be part of the care planning process, whether the child or young person is subject to a child in need plan, child protection plan, looked after or going through the adoption process, as all of this informs their life story. This may be accomplished via the use of effective Direct Work and Life Story Work.Terminology
* When discussing this area of work a number of terms tend to be used interchangeably, although they describe quite different activities. The following definitions attempt to differentiate between these terms for greater clarity:
* “Direct Work’- this describes working face-to-face with a child using a variety of methods, according to the age, level of understanding and preference of the child. The focus can be on any subject. Methods include play, story books, picture cards, photos, jig-saws, drawing, puppets, toys, videos, workbooks, family trees, eco maps, timelines, CD-Roms etc.
* ‘Life story work’ means telling the story of a child’s life history to enable the child to understand their past. In the majority of situations this will involve direct work with the child, in an age-appropriate way. This work is meant to help a child understand their journey.
* The “life story book” is one of the means of recording information about the child’s past in an accessible way for the child. It will include both photos and narratives, which the child is comfortable with. For the majority of children this could be the tangible outcome of life story work.  For those children who cannot be engaged in direct work.  (mainly the under 2s) the book will be prepared on their behalf for the future. It is however also important to note that there are many ways engaging children in life story work and it is important to be creative and focus on the child’s needs and what best would suit the circumstances and allow a child to understand their history.
* For children and young people where the permanency plan includes long term fostering in a fostering placement, residential, etc. the parameters of what to include in the chosen format (book, folder, etc.) is decided upon by the child and the practitioner together are usually prepared for children whose permanency plan is adoption.
* Photos should be stored in Memory Boxes. Any photos included in the life story books or other forms of life story work (other than the child’s photos of them alone) should be agreed upon during supervision between the practitioner and line manager to determine suitability based on any risks involved with including photos (e.g. photos which may triggers memories of a traumatic event).
**2. Principles of Direct Work and Life Story Work with Children and Young PeopleDirect Work**
* Provides children with an opportunity to express their feelings about significant events that have occurred and gain some understanding of these events;
* Helps children put the past in perspective;
* Helps children to be comfortable with their current situation and to gain an understanding of why they live where they do;
* Enables children to participate in the planning process as the social worker shares plans for the future with them and ascertain their views of those plans;
* May enhance the child’s attachment to current family members; and
* Can prepare them for transition to a new family.
* Direct Work with Children and Young People Subject to Child in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans
* Children subject to Child in Need Plans and Child Protection Plan are generally living with their family at home. It is important to help children and young people understand what is happening to them and why. They require an avenue to express their views, wishes and feelings regarding the social worker’s involvement, how they and their family are functioning, and receive support to feel confident about their future, which may include the process of exploring their memories of events, helping children to ‘process’ traumatic experiences and helping with social aspects of the child’s life (Shemmings and Rhodes 2012).Direct Work with Children and Young People Living Temporarily in Foster Placements or Residential Care. Children and young people not living with their birth families temporarily will need support when working through with their thoughts, feelings and emotions about living apart from their families, adjusting to a new environment, coping with day to day living and working through their transition back home, if this is the plan.If the decision is in the best interest of the child or young person to remain in their foster placement or residential care home on a long term basis then Life Story Work, should be initiated.
* Why is Life Story Work Important?Children who live with their birth families have many opportunities to know their past and to clarify past and present events. However, children separated from their birth families are often denied these opportunities; they may have changed families, social workers, schools, homes, and moved away from familiar neighbourhoods and communities. Children who lose track of their past and who are confused about the present are likely to find it difficult to develop emotionally and socially. They will struggle to develop a secure understanding of who they are, have difficulty in developing secure attachments to other adults, and may get ‘stuck’ in damaging fantasies they form to make sense of their confusion.Effective Direct Work and Life Story Work requires planning and consideration of the child’s background, their needs, thoughts, feelings and level of understanding. Practitioners should also be mindful of the importance of utilising resources available such as records to provide background information, support from the process of supervision in managing their own feelings and experiences when facilitating direct work with children and young people and being mindful of responding to verbal and non-verbal cues displayed by the child or young person, choosing a suitable environment, etc.

* Appendix A: Principles of Direct Work and Life Story with Children  and Young People for more information.
**3. Direct Work Procedures**Initiating Direct Work
* When agreeing the CIN, CP or CLA plan objectives with children, young people and their families, practitioners should discuss the purpose of direct work and the possible methods that may be used to carry out that work with them (e.g. observation, discussion, activities, etc.…).
* In addition to how the direct work will be carried out, it would be beneficial to inform the child, young person and their family about what topics may be brought up (e.g. objectives within care plan including reason for social services involvement, substance misuse, domestic violence, education, etc.…). This will provide clarity for the family in terms of how the practitioner plans to assist them and what to expect during visits.
* When undertaking direct work, the child’s Social Worker will need to:Introduce direct work to parents and encourage them to engage;
* For children Looked After ask foster carers to contribute to Life Story materials at an early stage;Listen to the child’s wishes and feelings regarding their readiness to undertake direct work and life story work.
* Listen to the child’s perception about their own situation;
* Communicate clearly and simply using concepts which are likely to be familiar to this particular child;
* Ask the child for feedback to confirm whether the child has understood what has been said;
* Give the child opportunity to ask questions as often as he/she wishes;
* Reinforce the positives in the child’s life.
* Help the Looked After child to develop a simple script that can be used to explain to others why they are not living with their birth parents. Ensure that this is agreed with their current carers and any other significant persons;
* Use tools such as memory boxes, story books, puzzles, picture cards, Eco Maps, etc…;
* Ensure case records indicate that Direct Work has been carried out (by using the case note heading ‘Direct Work) and add copies of activities to Livelink.**Ceasing Direct Work**
* Whether the child or young person is living at home with their families, living with foster parents or in a residential care home temporarily, when children’s services ceases involvement, the direct work objectives should be reviewed to determine the extent of any changes made or if there is any ongoing support required to address unresolved issues. When the time comes for Children’s Services to end involvement it would be envisaged that the direct work conducted with children, young people and their families will support them in maintaining their progress as a family.
* While conducting direct work the ending of that needs to be considered throughout and planned for.
* If the direct work ends in an unexpected way, for example a child on a child in need plan and consent is withdrawn, then the child, young person and their family may not experience closure. In such instances practitioners should consider sending information, along with the closure letter, reviewing the positive goals obtained via the direct work that was conducted and include a reminder of any outstanding objectives and who they may contact if they wish to have further support.
* For children and young people not ceasing direct work as they will remain in placement on a long term basis or there is a plan for adoption, their care plan should reflect the addition of Life Story Work
* **4.Life Story Work ProceduresInitiating Life Story Work**
* Life Story Work should support the child’s understanding of their life story from the time they make contact with Children’s Services.
* Even children as young as 2 or 3 can be given simple explanations which will help to prepare the child should reunification not be possible.
* Through Direct Work children are helped to have a basic understanding of why they came into care and the decisions made in respect of them thus the transition into  life story work forms a logical progression at the point where it becomes clear that the child is unlikely to return home. This marks the beginning of the first phase of life story work which helps the child to understand the reasons why they are unable to return home and to express their feelings about this.
* When the CLA Review confirms that the child’s permanence plan should be adoption or long term fostering, the Team Manager, in conjunction with the Social Worker during supervision, should outline plans for the ongoing development of life story work and Life Story Books. The pace, progress  and timing of  life story work must be consistent with other processes that are underway, particularly the Court and Adoption Panel processes. However, even if direct work with the child is not possible at certain times, it will still be possible to plan the next phase of work and gather the information that will be needed

 **Appendix B: Understanding  and Telling provides useful guidance on telling the child about the past and the child’s understanding, both related to the child’s age and stage of development**.

**Who Should Undertake Life Story Work**

* Life story work is based on a relationship, and should not be seen as simply completing a task.“Children in foster care and adoption are on a journey and many parts of it are difficult. They need to feel that someone is with them on that journey and they need a framework to help them think about it and feel safe” (Schofield, G. and Beek, M. 2006).
* The Child’s Social Worker is responsible for ensuring the work is done, and in most cases will be the person who has the quality of relationship with the child which makes them the appropriate person to do that work. However, there may be circumstances in which the work can be usefully delegated to or shared with a colleague or other worker who is trusted by the child. Overall, the child’s social worker remains responsible for coordinating the life story work. This should be discussed in supervision sessions, where it should be accorded some priority given its importance in supporting the child to move on. Detailed discussion should also form part of the Looked After Review.
* Workers undertaking life story work should be skilled in working directly with children Their role is to create a secure base for the child to explore their past, present and future. If the child’s worker is taking the lead, this will be part of the continuum of ongoing work with the child. If another worker is to be involved, this will be a discrete piece of work which will need to be managed and supervised throughout.
* In addition to practitioners, other professionals are also a valuable resource in working in conjunction with the lead practitioner in contributing to life story work such as Student Social Workers, Family Centre Workers, Nurseries, Foster Carers, etc. by providing information, photographs they have taken, memorabilia through activities conducted with the child, etc. For a table of examples of information that can be provided by various professionals. Collecting Memorabilia
* From the time a child has contact with Children’s Services, the collection of information (e.g. genograms, photos, family background, etc.) through the assessment and planning process should support the child’s understanding of their life story thus far,  and this information would contribute to any life story work taking place in the future. If this information and memorabilia is lost, it may never be regained for the child. Birth families, all workers involved in the child’s journey should take responsibility and have a role in collecting memorabilia of all significant events/achievements for the child. This information should be recorded for the child, and any memorabilia given to the child (or held in safekeeping by the carers according to the child’s age and understanding).Foster carers are often in the best position to gather information about the child’s daily life and significant events.

For example:Hospital birth tags etc. (newborn babies);Developmental milestones;Health records, illness, injuries, accidents;Favourite activities and achievements;Birthdays and religious celebrations;Holidays;Special friends;Pets;Photos of significant people e.g. birth family, friends from their community, foster carers and their homes;‘Funny’ moments caught on photograph;Photos, anecdotes, stories about birth family contact;School reports;Special activities at school e.g. sports day;Educational achievements e.g. Certificates;Special interests e.g. Scouts, sports or leisure activities (certificates, photos etc.);Church, religious activities and significant events.Involvement of Other AgenciesLooked after children may have many adults and professionals involved in their lives and before beginning life story work it is essential to be aware of any other agency that is currently working with the child to both support the child and contribute to the child’s life story work.Careful and sensitive consideration must be given to the impact on the child (and the child’s carers) of beginning life story work.

* It is vital to understand the focus of the work being undertaken by the other agency/organisation, the basis and timescale for their involvement, and how appropriately this sits alongside the proposed life story work. Therefore it is important that contributions from other agencies are agreed upon and incorporated in to the care plan and discussed as part of the CLA Review process.**Identity and Diversity Issues**
* Life story work is fundamental to the formation of a positive sense of identity. Fostered and adopted children may have a number of difficulties in accepting and valuing themselves, and this can be compounded by the sense of difference some children will feel as a result of their ethnicity, religion, disability etc. It is therefore essential that the work that is done acknowledges difference and values this as fundamental to who the child is. The social worker should consider the most appropriate way to achieve this.
* The starting point for exploring the child’s identity should be what the child knows and understands about their origins, and how they perceive themselves.After this, comes the way in which the child is perceived by others, particularly by their carer and any siblings.The way in which the child is perceived and treated by other adults and children in different settings, especially school, should also be explored.It is important to acknowledge that many children still experience stigmatisation as a result of being looked after, which can be compounded by responses to their “difference”, whether covert or overt.
* Where there is uncertainty about the racial heritage of a child which cannot be resolved, it is important to acknowledge this in the work that is done. Workers should provide information to the child about the various possibilities.A child’s racial heritage may be quite complex. A key message that has emerged in practice is that workers should never presume a child is of white British origin. A child may have a black father, but present as white, for example. It is also noted that greater numbers of children from Eastern European backgrounds are present in the general population and may come to be represented in the looked after population.
* Where the child has some level of learning disability, careful thought will need to be given to the implications this will have on undertaking life story work considering in particular the most effective methods of communication. This will be based on a clear and informed assessment of the child’s level of understanding and ability. It is almost inevitable that this will involve others who know the child well and can support the work. Practitioners should make efforts to communicate with children utilising a variety of methods appropriate for their needs to ensure inclusion (e.g. Makaton, sign language, pictures, iPad, etc…).Consideration must also be given for life story work with unaccompanied minors and asylum seeking children they may become looked after with minimal to no ties with their birth family. Practitioners need to consider contacting the Embassy of the young person’s country of origin in order to gather information about the young person and their family to help to understand their life history.The use of interpreting services should also be considered to ensure effective communication.
**5. Preparing Children and Young People for Long Term Fostering**The decision for Long Term Fostering as a means of permanency needs to be formally agreed and included in the care plan.Children and young people need help to understand he decision for their care plan to be long term fostering and how they develop a narrative that embraces their birth family and foster family whilst incorporating the key principles of life story work above.

**6. Preparing Children and Young People for Adoption**

* Once the agency has agreed adoption as the preferred permanence option, the court has made a Care Order, the main focus of direct work with the child will change to preparation for adoption. Although the agency will be unable to place the child with prospective adopters until authority to place has been obtained through a Placement Order or formal parental consent, direct work should begin to focus on the meaning of adoption.
* The work already undertaken (including direct work and life story work) is essential prerequisites to allow preparation for adoption to begin.Regulation 13 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 requires the agency to:Provide a counselling service for the child;Explain to the child in an appropriate manner the procedures for and the legal implications of adoption;Provide the child with appropriate written information about the above matters as relevant; and Ascertain the child’s wishes and feelings regarding;The possibility of placement for adoption with a new family;His religious and cultural upbringing; and  Contact with his parent or guardian or other relative, or with any other person the agency considers relevant.Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2013 (Chapter 2 paras 2.16 – 2.21) develops the following ideas as follows:CounsellingThe child should be helped to understand:What adoption would mean for him or her now and in the longer term;Why the agency considers they should not stay with their own family or short term current carer, and why adoption is the preferred option for their permanence;The implications of adoption on their contact with parents, other family members and others.InformationVerbal information should be shared in a way which takes account of a range of possible factors, including:The child’s first language;Communication or learning impairments;Religious beliefs or other values.Written information should also be provided about the process and meaning of adoption. The children’s guide, “Understanding Adoption” should be used in work with children who have a permanence plan of adoption.

**Diversity and Family Structures**When preparing the child for adoption, it is important to recognise that there are all sorts of families and therefore talking to a child about having a “new Mummy and Daddy” should be avoided. It is more appropriate to talk in terms of having a “new family” with some explanation being given to the different sorts of families that exist.Establishing the Child’s ViewsIt is important that the child’s wishes and feelings are sought, recorded and taken into consideration at every stage.
**7. Adoption Panel’s Expectations**At the “plan” stage, it is important that the Child’s Permanence Report provides a clear and detailed explanation of what life story work has already been completed, what remains to be done, who will be responsible for this, and within what timescale. The Adoption Panel may well ask for clarification, in terms of how long it will be before active family finding can begin.At the “matching” stage the Adoption Panel will expect an update on the progress of life story work and to see what has been produced so far in terms of a life story book.

 **8. Preparing the Child or Young Person Once Prospective Adopters have been Identified and Matched**

* Once the authority has approved the placement of the child with specific adopters, preparation needs to focus on a new phase of direct work with the child. This will include the following:Identifying any further work that might need to be done in relation to the child saying “goodbye” to birth parents or other birth family members;
* Identifying any work that needs to be completed in relation to the current plans for contact with birth parents or other birth family members or any other people;
* Helping the child to express what s/he feels about leaving the current carer;
* Recognising that the child may be concerned about what the birth parent/s or other members of the birth family may feel about them moving to an adoptive family;
* Helping the child to express what they feel excited or worried about;
* Helping the child to think about what it is important to take with them from the current placement;
* Giving the child details/information about the adopters in a way that they can understand, e.g. a “family book” with photographs and other material prepared by the adopter/s;Helping the child to ask any questions they may have about the proposed adopter/s and to think about their feelings;Informing the child about the visits of introduction that are planned;Informing the child about the proposed timescales for introductions, overnight stays and finally moving in.
* **It is the agency’s expectation that the book will be available to the child and prospective adopters at the point of placement.** Children will often ask questions or make comments about their history in the early stages of placement, and prospective adopters need to have the life story book to help them try to explain.If this is not available at the point of placement, the Adoption Placement Plan must record the date by which the life story book should be completed, and this should be monitored at subsequent reviews. Prospective adopters will have grounds for complaint if the life story book is unreasonably delayed.
**9. Transferring the Life Story Book to the Adoptive Family**

The ideal time to transfer the book to the prospective adopters is during the period of introductions. The draft life story book should be given to the adopters by the second adoption review meeting and the completed life story book should be provided within 10 working days (or soon after if possible) of the adoption ceremony, i.e. the ceremony to celebrate the making of the adoption order. The Practice Lead must ensure cases are not closed until after the Later Life Letter and Life Story Books are completed and provided. When the life story book has been completed in draft, the child’s social worker should share this with the prospective adopters’ worker. A joint visit with the adopter’s social worker should then be arranged to go through the book with the prospective adopters. This is important to ensure that they are aware of the information it contains and the style of presentation. They should be invited to comment on this so that when the final book is produced they are fully committed to using it with their adopted child and allowing the child free access to it. Once this is available, the child’s worker should deliver the book to the adoptive family and go through it with the child and prospective adopters together, where the child is of an appropriate age to do so. This ensures that the child knows that the book is available, where it will be kept and how it can be accessed. It also means that the child is aware that the prospective adopters know about the child’s past and there are no secrets. Within 10 days (or as soon as possible) of the Adoption Celebration Hearing, the case record of the child should be closed.
**10. Sources of Future information**

* Preparation for adoption is a time-specific aspect of direct work with children, but life story work is an ongoing process which precedes this phase and also continues after placement for adoption. The life story book has the effect of freezing time, and adoptive parents will find it necessary to re-interpret the child’s past as the child grows older, more questioning and more able to understand the circumstances of their adoption. The tools available to adopters to assist in this process are:Child’s Permanence Report - prepared at the stage of identifying adoption as the preferred option for permanence. Given to the prospective adopters when considering the placement;Later Life Letter - prepared at the stage of placement. Given to the prospective adopters at the point of the adoption order.When completing the above reports consideration should be made as to the impact the information may have in the future as one of the functions of such reports is to act as “a source of important information for the adopted adult about their life history and heritage”.Child’s Permanency Reports and Later Life Letters need to be child-centred.Further detailed guidance can be found in Later Life Letters Guidance.
**11. Bibliography**Guide to Confident Direct Work with Children (Yvonne Shemmings and Honor Rhodes, Community Care Inform, 2012)“Making Life Story Books” – Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker“A Child’s Journey Through Placement” by Vera FahlbergTalking Pictures – CoramBAAF“Techniques for Working with Children: 1- Pat Owen and Pat Curtis, C.M.C.V.S Print Service, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, ManchesterResources – Children’s pack for panel and adoption available from the Adoption TeamAttachment handbook for foster care and adoption.
(Schofield, G.and Beek, M. CoramBAAF, 2006):Life Story Work: a practical guide to helping children understand their past.
(Ryan, T. and Walker, R. CoramBAAF, 2003)Preparing children for permanence: A guide to undertaking direct work for social workers, foster carers and adoptive parents.(Mary Romaine, with Tricia Turley and Non Tuckey, CoramBAAF 2007) 10 Top Tips for Placing Children.
(Argent, H. CoramBAAF, 2006)
**Appendix A: Principles of Direct Work and Life Story Work with Children and Young PeoplePreparation**
* Have a clear and purposeful plan to carry out direct work and life story work. Details of how the interventions will support meeting the child’s needs should be included in care plans;Consider the child’s developmental level and remember some children may operate at a level below their chronological age due to learning disability or being “stuck” emotionally. (See Resource Pack - Summaries of Child Development and also Vera Fahlberg, Child Development Workbook 1998 - CoramBAAF);
* Be aware of cultural factors and research these e.g. race, religion, identity issues, different family and community norms;
* Check your records, and your knowledge of background information and gather material on important events, the child’s life their family names, pets etc.Consult and share at all stages of the work the child’s carer and the supervising social worker.
* The foster carer should be informed of how and when the work will be done,  and ask the child if he/she would like the foster carer present at each session. Foster carers will be able to provide emotional support for the child during and between sessions, so their close involvement is crucial. The work may be painful for the child, so prepare for this, as the carer will have to support the child following the session  and they need to be aware of what occurred if they were not present during the session;
* Recognise your own feelings about personal experiences of loss and separation, grief and rejection as these may be triggered for you in your work with the child. Acknowledge these feelings and be aware of them to avoid them blocking you helping the child;Discuss the progress of your work in regular supervision with your line manager where appropriate advice and guidance should be given. Supervision is also an appropriate place to explore any personal feelings about the information you need to share with the child about their past as well as a way to gaining feedback regarding ongoing development of skills to support the child.
* **Do...**Get to know the child as well as possible and develop a friendly, trusting relationship (e.g. building rapport, providing undivided attention, refraining from use of Jargon, being clear with intentions, stick to planned visits, be reliable, etc…);
* Be clear with the foster carer that the focus of the visit is to undertake life story work, to avoid being side-tracked into discussing day-to-day placement issues;
* Do the work in a safe, comfortable environment and work physically on the child’s level (e.g. usually on the floor);
* Respect the child’s ability to solve problems and make choices (this may include not wishing to do a particular part of the work at any one time because they are not ready). Being flexible with the agenda for the session and working at the child’ pace would be beneficial;
* Find out what the child can do well or what she/he enjoys. This will give them confidence, but give them the opportunity to try something new, and remember that children can also express themselves in play what they can’t express in words;
* Check out your perceptions. They may not be the same as the child’s. Acknowledge the child’s feelings and give feedback of observations to the child;Respect confidences and be aware of what disclosures may need to be passed on. Explain why to the child;Be alert to non-verbal responses, e.g. body language, talking in ‘third party’, eye contact etc.Be prepared to go over things several times and in different ways, to convey the same message. Children don’t always ‘hear’ things first time, particularly if it is painful.
* **Appendix B: Understanding and Telling**.**Understanding and TellingPre-verbal Stage**Children at this stage:Begin to understand language before speech develops;Begin to process information;Need to hear and become familiar with the word “adoption”, leading to emotional acceptance of adoption and greater receptiveness to more complex information later on.

**2 - 6 Years**Most pre-school age children do not understand much about adoption even though told they are adopted. They may use the word in referring to themselves, but they often confuse being born with being adopted.Children at this stage:Are egocentric and can’t see another’s point of view;Can’t handle too many bits of information all at once;Think they are responsible for everything that happens (magical thinking);Have a different concept of time to adults;Don’t understand relationships;Find greater significance in where they live and who cares for them;Don’t distinguish between the parental (caring) role and the parental (birth) relationship.Children may respond to a simple story from their point of view, which concentrates on the here and now.

**6 - 8 Years**Children at this stage:Understand the difference between adoption and birth as alternative ways of entering a family;Accept adoption as permanent, but don’t understand why;This acceptance relies on “blind faith” (e.g. because Mummy says so”).Children are likely to accept their story without question and accept the basic explanations provided.

**8 - 10 Years**Children at this stage:Develop a more sophisticated understanding of adoption;Can see things from other people’s point of view;Can see other sides to a story and consider alternatives;Can distinguish between perception and reality;May begin to recognise the loss of their birth family and grieve;May begin to question the permanence of adoption, thinking birth parents may re-claim or adoptive parents give them up;May regress to an earlier stage of development as they struggle to deal with more complex thoughts and the fear that this may not be permanent;Children’s understanding of adoption increases, resulting in more questions, which need more detailed answers and may become more challenging. Children need reassurance from their adoptive parents that they are here to stay.

**10 - 13 Years**Children at this stage:Begin to grasp the concept that there was a legal process involved with their adoption;Are still unsure about why this has made their adoption permanent.13 Years +Children appreciate that adoption involves the legal transfer of parental responsibility, with all the rights and responsibilities this entails, from their birth parents to their adoptive p