



Adoption Disruptions

Policy and Procedure

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1. Desired Outcome/Summary

1.1. The aim of this policy is to ensure there is clear guidance and procedures with respect to working to prevent disruptions in adoptive families, and in responding sensitively and appropriately where a disruption has taken place.

Together4Children is committed to maximising placement stability for children and young people who are Looked After, or who are adopted, by:

- Offering support to adoption placements to prevent disruptions;
- Learning from breakdowns and disruptions;
- Using that knowledge to inform how the needs of Looked After children and adopted children are met, both now and in the future.

1.2 The purpose of this policy is to promote placement stability and to prevent and address disruptions in adoptive families.

1.3 The policy formalises the process to support the maintenance of placements. It also formalises the process to learn from disruptions where placements cannot be maintained.

2. Definition of Disruption

2.1 For the purpose of this Policy disruption is defined as:

“A disruption is the premature ending of a placement, of a child or children placed for adoption with prospective adopter(s), prior to the making of an Adoption Order.”

2.2 A decision not to proceed with a potential adoptive placement during introductions is not considered a disruption; however, a meeting will be held for the purpose of learning and practice development. The agenda for this meeting could follow that of a disruption meeting but should be called a Premature Ending of Introductions Meeting. Timescales to hold this meeting should follow that of a disruption meeting.

2.3 Any significant event in a prospective adopter(s) circumstances, including Premature Ending of Introductions, should result in a Prospective Adopter(s) Review. The review report alongside the minutes of the Premature Ending of Introductions Meeting and, any learning and practice development matter identified, should be reported back to the Adoption Panel.

2.4 A placement can disrupt at the request of the prospective adoptive parents, or by a decision made by the placing authority for the child, and different procedures may apply for the two different scenarios. It should be noted that the shared parental responsibility that prospective adopters have will end when the child returns to Local Authority care.

2.5 An adoption breakdown is defined as the ending of an adoption placement when an Adoption Order has been granted and the child who has been adopted returns to the care of the Local Authority. It should be noted that the adoptive parents retain parental responsibility and should be consulted in all matters relating to the child's care.

3. Underpinning Legislation and Guidance

- Adoption and Children Act (2002).
- Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005), Regulation 36.
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption.
- Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005).

4. Policy and Procedure

4.1 Remit

4.2 The policy applies to the disruption of a prospective adoptive placement of a child placed by The Regional Partnership, in the period prior to the granting of an Adoption Order.

4.3 Where children have been placed for adoption by another adoption agency, the disruption process would be dealt with by that placing Agency.

5. Preventing a Placement Disruption

5.1 Preventing placement disruption begins with robust and pro-active care planning, which is the key to improving outcomes for children through placement stability.

5.2 Reflections on disruptions demonstrate the value of early intervention when issues begin to arise in placements and may prevent disruptions.

5.3 If it becomes apparent that an adoptive placement is at risk of disruption prior to the Adoption Order, the Child's Social Worker or Adoption worker will arrange a placement support meeting within 5 working days.

5.4 The aim will be to ensure that universal or targeted resources and/or specialist services are identified and put into place to prevent the ending of the placement where this is in the child's/young person's best interest.

5.5 The placement support meeting should be convened prior to any request being made for an alternative placement based on disruption. The continuing placement would be considered in context of the safety to the child.

5.6 The placement support meeting will consider the nature and potential risks to the current placement and what needs to happen to support it. This meeting is not like a routine review and should not be a substitute for other scheduled meetings. There may be several meetings held during a placement.

5.7 The meeting will:

- Be chaired by one of the Adoption Assessment & Support Team Managers or the Children's Team Managers;
- Gather and analyse information and views where appropriate from:



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- Child/young person;
- Prospective Adopter(s);
- Child's Social Worker;
- Adoption Social Worker;
- Child's IRO;
- Foster carer;
- Fostering Social Worker;
- Other professionals involved with the child or prospective adopter(s).

5.8 The prospective adopter(s) and all Social Workers concerned should attend together with their Managers. The Team Managers should have discussed options, including the financial implications, with a Senior Manager before the meeting and be empowered to make decisions.

5.9 All decisions must be recorded on the child's and prospective adopter(s) record so there can be no doubt about what action will be taken.

5.10 The placement support meeting agenda will depend on the presenting situation and should be focused on supporting the placement.

5.11 Its purpose is to:

- Demonstrate support for the prospective adopter(s) and the child;
- Try to move on and not get stuck;
- Share and acknowledge feelings rather than apportion blame;
- Identify issues leading to placement difficulties;
- Agree the child's and prospective adopter(s) current needs;
- Make action plans to provide for needs or to state clearly if any needs cannot be met;
- Set time limits for action and dates to monitor progress, including setting up a review meeting;
- Hear and understand the child's wishes and feelings;
- Leave the door open for continuation or disruption.

5.12 In addition:

- The meeting should consider existing resources that can be accessed which will enable the prospective adopter(s) to continue with the placement.

6. Siblings

6.1 Where siblings are placed together individual needs must be considered, including the possibility of one or more siblings remaining in the placement.

6.2 Social Workers must assess not only whether the children would do better together or apart, but also must balance the value of an established placement for one against that of an unknown future for the intact group. Therefore, if a sibling assessment has already been

completed, this should be updated. If there is not a sibling assessment, one should be completed by the Child Social Worker.

7. Siblings in contact

7..1 If there is a disruption that may involve decisions about separating siblings, the children's Social Worker must liaise with the Adoption Support Team directly in the following circumstances: -

- Siblings are being separated;
- Letterbox or direct contact is already in place;
- Before any consideration is made to contact the child's birth family.

7.2 This is to ensure there is a coordinated approach to informing birth family members about any change of circumstance for the child(ren) whose placement has disrupted.

8. Where the Agency has identified Concerns

8.1 If there are any concerns or allegations of child abuse or neglect against the prospective adoptive parent(s), then the relevant safeguarding local policies will apply and reference should be made to the Allegations Against Foster Carers or Prospective Adopter(s) policy.

8.2 If the concerns are more generalised about the care of the child and not raising issues of significant harm, then the Social Workers must discuss the situation with their Manager. For example, if there are concerns that the relationship between the prospective adopter(s) and child is not positive and is not improving over time, consideration should be given, according to the circumstances, as to whether a placement support meeting is appropriate and if so, these procedures should be followed.

8.3 The areas to focus on in the meeting should include:

- Areas of concern and the evidence available to substantiate these;
- The child's and prospective adopter(s) current requirements and whether more support can meet these needs or whether they cannot be met;
- The views of the Social Workers and consideration as to whether the placement should continue to be supported or disrupted;
- The implications for the child of this change of plan, including consideration of the most appropriate alternative placement;
- Who should inform the prospective adopter(s) of the decision not to continue to support the placement;
- Who would be the most appropriate person to move the child from the adoptive home, and how and when this should be done;
- The birth parents present situation and who should advise them of the change of plan;
- The child's current legal status and how this may be affected by the change of plan;
- Future contact needs of the child and prospective adopter(s).

8.4 The prospective adopter(s) should have been visited and involved in discussions before the Placement Support Meeting, so that they will be aware of the concerns and will have had time to consider the area of difficulty or dispute and consider their future plans. The

prospective adopter(s) must be visited again immediately after the meeting and advised of the outcome and the concerns in writing.

8.5 In some circumstances and ideally, it may be possible to work with the prospective adopter(s) to prepare the child for moving, in which case a Planning Meeting should be convened. In other circumstances it may be that prospective adopter(s) are either too distressed or too angry to be involved, and the Social Workers should be prepared for a request to remove the child at the time.

9. Notice of Intention to Remove the Child(ren)

9.1 When a decision has been made to remove the child prior to the prospective adopter(s) making their application to adopt to the Court, the prospective adopter(s) must be served notice of the agency's intention to remove the child and the child must be returned to the care of the placing Authority within 7 days of notice. Child protection procedures will supersede this if a child is at risk. The child's local Legal Department should be consulted about the drafting of this notice before it is served.

9.2 Where this notice period is not possible to achieve due to the need to safeguard the welfare of the child, verbal explanation should be provided at the time of removal, with a written explanation sent by the placing authority to the prospective adopter(s) , their Agency and the child's IRO, within 3 working days.

9.3 The prospective adopter(s) Agency should be given written notice of this intention and the reasons for doing so to support the prospective adopter(s). The birth parents must also be notified in writing that the placement has ended.

10. Disruption After Lodging the Adoption Application

10.1 If prospective adopter(s) wish to end the placement after lodging their application to adopt the child, the procedures above should be followed. Additionally, the Social Worker for the prospective adopter(s) must immediately notify the Court about the change in plans. The prospective adopter(s), or their solicitor, should notify the Court in writing that they wish to withdraw their application

10.2 Where the Local Authority determines to remove the child after the prospective adopter(s) have lodged their application to adopt, immediate legal advice should be sought as the child cannot be removed without the agreement of the Court (s35(5) Adoption and Children Act 2002). It will be necessary to serve written notice of the agency's intention to remove the child on the prospective adopter(s), with their Adoption Agency and the birth parents also being notified.

10.3 The Social Worker for the prospective adopter(s) must offer whatever support and help the family need after the child has been removed. Discussions will take place later, after the Disruption Meeting, about whether the prospective adopter(s) should be reassessed and either deregistered or reapproved for further children.

11. Responding to a Placement Disruption

- 11.1 Where a placement disrupts, support and counselling will be provided for the child by the Child's Social Worker. Support will be provided to the prospective adopter(s) by the Adoption Social Worker and they will signpost to access counselling if required.
- 11.2 Where the prospective adopter(s) gives notice of the placement ending, the Child's Social Worker and Adoption Social Worker will:
- Make a referral to the placement service within the child's placing Authority to find another placement;
 - Notify the Adoption Panel Advisor of a placement disruption;
 - Notify the Adoption Support Team;
 - Where appropriate, notify the Letter box Coordinator of the disruption;
 - Notify the person responsible for finance if Adoption Support Allowances are being paid.
- 11.3 Planning disruptions should be as careful a task as planning introductions. If prospective adopter(s) still wish to end the placement, they should ideally be as involved in the child's move away as they were when the child came to them.
- 11.4 Wherever possible, a Planning Meeting should be organised with the prospective adopter(s), chaired by the Team Manager for the child, with the Team Manager for the prospective adopter(s) and relevant Social Workers. The child's needs will be the focus. It should discuss:
- Who will say what, when and where to the child(ren);
 - Consideration of the most appropriate alternative placement;
 - Who would be the best person to move the child(ren) and how and when this should be done;
 - How will the child(ren)'s belongings be transferred?
 - The appropriateness of continuing contact between the prospective adopter(s) and the child(ren);
 - The birth parents present situation and clarification of who should advise them of the change of plan;
 - The child(ren)'s current legal status and how this may be affected by the change of plan.
- 11.5 The prospective adopter(s) should be given as much support as possible during this difficult time. They should be advised that a review and discussions will take place later, after a Disruption meeting, about whether they should or wish to be considered for the placement of another child.
- 11.6 When an alternative placement has been identified, the Child's Social Worker and/or prospective adopter's Social Worker will: -
- Inform relevant professionals;
 - Inform the Independent Reviewing Officer who will decide whether an early statutory review is required;
 - Support prospective adopter(s) and be present at the actual move;

- Ensure that any life story work materials move with the child and that planned work continues;
- Review the Permanence Plan through the formal planning process, including allocation for family finding and linking into the statutory care plan review process;
- Following the Looked After Children's review, any change of plan needs to follow current procedures;
- Inform the birth parents and any other person with parental responsibility;
- Ensure contact is considered between foster carers and the prospective adoptive parent(s);
- Arrange the placement disruption meeting.

12. The Disruption Meeting

- 12.1 The expectation is that there will be a Disruption Meeting following an adoption disruption.
- 12.2 There may be an exceptional reason why it is not appropriate to hold a meeting, but instead offer an alternative means by which information can be shared, e.g. the independent chair could arrange to visit all parties involved to gather the information and then provide a detailed report with recommendations.
- 12.3 The Disruption Meeting will follow a set agenda and will be held after the the child leaves the adoptive home, is placed in a local authority placement and no sooner than 28 days/no later than 42 days after the placement breakdown.
- 12.4 The appropriate timing varies after a disruption, as everyone needs some time to recover before they can reflect on what happened. The important thing is to enable children and families to regard disruption meetings as an integral part of placement support.
- 12.5 Disruption Meetings are an opportunity for all those involved to look in an open way and with the benefit of hindsight, at the issues that may have contributed to the placement breakdown, so all can learn from the experience. The purpose is:
- to enable participants to share information and feelings about the adoption process, the placement and the disruption without assigning blame;
 - to identify factors that have led to disruption;
 - to identify what has been learnt from the placement about the child and to use this to plan further for the child;
 - to identify with the prospective adopter(s) what has been learnt about the placement and to highlight what support will be needed to come to terms with the disruption;
 - to highlight areas for development in practice and policy.
- 12.6 It needs to be recognised that a Disruption Meeting will be stressful for all concerned, particularly the prospective adopter(s), and attention must be paid to creating a comfortable atmosphere. An appropriate venue should be considered.
- 12.7 The Disruption Meeting should be chaired by an independent chair, or a Team Manager, who has **not** had previous line management responsibility for the child or prospective adopter(s).

12.8 The Adoption Team Manager and Social Worker will act as convenor of the Disruption Meeting with responsibility for the preparation, coordination and liaison necessary. They will:

- agree with the Chair a suitable date;
- make sure all parties are consulted about dates, travel and childcare arrangements, and have the support they require to participate in the meeting;
- book a suitable venue with refreshments;
- send out invitations and maps.

12.9 Careful consideration must be given about who should attend the meeting. Everyone who has been involved before, during and after the placement could have valuable observations to make. Consider:

- previous and current carers;
- the prospective adopters;
- Child's Social Worker
- Adoption Social Worker and their manager;
- Fostering Social Worker;
- Family Support Worker/Family Finder/Permanence Coordinator;
- Independent Reviewing Officer;
- relevant others, e.g. teachers; health professionals; nursery, school, health visitor, therapists.

13. Confidential Section

13.1 Personal details about the prospective adopter(s) should not be made available to all attendees at the meeting and should be restricted to the chair/minute taker/, Adoption and relevant managers/social workers.

13.2 Consideration should be given to conducting the meeting in sections to allow for information to be gathered from attendees who should not be given confidential information about the prospective adopter(s) i.e. teachers, foster carers, nursery.

13.3 If prospective adopters want to bring their solicitor, they should be advised that the function of the meeting is not adversarial and be helped to feel confident that a solicitor will not be needed. If they insist our Legal Department must be consulted and may send a representative, however, the legal representative may be asked to leave should there be confidential information shared which they are not party to.

13.4 Prospective adopter(s) may bring a supporter with them; however, they may not be able to be involved at some point in the meeting if safeguarding issues are to be raised.

13.5 Consideration must always be given to the child's contribution to the meeting. This depends on their age, understanding and circumstances. Their Social Worker should talk to them about how they can be involved, and how their wishes and views can be conveyed to the meeting. This can be in a variety of ways, e.g. tape, video and letters, as well as coming to all or part of the meeting. Some Chairs of the meeting arrange to meet the child beforehand. In such circumstances the child, subject to age and understanding, should be given the option of having an advocate

13.6 The following reports must be sent to the Chair one week before the Disruption Meeting:

- Child's Permanence Reports;
- Prospective Adopter's Report;
- Chronology both for the child's journey and for the prospective adopter's journey.
- Adoption Placement Report and Adoption Support Plan;
- LAC Reviews held after the placement with prospective adopters * Any other relevant meetings;
- Panel Minutes/ ADM Decision;
- The Child/ren's wishes and feelings obtained;
- Report from prospective adopters if they are unable to attend;
- Report from the Fostering Service.

14. The Role of the Disruption Meeting Chair

14.1 The Chair is independent of any case management responsibility and Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership has the following expectations:

- ensure that a 'no blame' approach is taken;
- read all the background information in advance;
- should use the agenda as a guide which should be circulated before the meeting. (see below);
- identify and summarise key contributory factors to the disruption and consider these when Family Finding for the child in the future;
- ensure minutes are objective, balanced and child friendly and key summary points are circulated according to the appropriate timescales;
- Make recommendations regarding prospective adopters/practice/support/children's plan/consideration for future matching/assessments;
- Ensure agreement on who will take the following actions after the meeting:
- send minutes to adoption panel members within 6 weeks of the meeting being held;
- attach minutes to child/young person's file and prospective adopters' file;
- The Chair should arrange for minutes of the meeting to be sent to the relevant people within 6 weeks.
- The Chair should decide what additionally provided information may need to be included within the minutes and the information that needs to be excluded, to ensure appropriate confidentiality in consultation with the Adoption Team Manager.
- Given the sensitive nature of the report, initials only will be used and to protect the information, the Chair should decide who should receive the full minutes and who should receive just a summary and recommendations of the meeting;
- A decision will need to be made as to who is best placed to share the recommendations from the meeting with those involved who did not attend the disruption meeting.

14.2 A summary of the Chair's Disruption Meeting Report and the key themes should influence learning for practitioners and recommendations on policy and practice. The minutes should also be sent to Adoption Panel for further reflection.

15. Proposed Agenda

To establish sufficient understanding of the factors that have led to placement breakdown, consideration will be given to:

- Agree at the beginning of the meeting- who will be informed of the outcomes and who will be sent the summary of key points and minutes;
- The Chair to agree to complete their own summary of the Disruption Meeting together with recommendations;
- Child's life prior to being placed for adoption;
- Child's preparation for adoption, including understanding of why they cannot stay with birth family;
- How any contact arrangements worked;
- Preparation, selection and matching process of the prospective adopter(s);
- Information given to prospective adopters, any gaps, impressions gained by them;
- Introductions – how these were reviewed, how everyone felt/coped;
- Any significant issues for previous Foster Carers and their role;
- The move – saying goodbye, child's reactions;
- What worked well, what was more difficult, contact with significant people;
- Discuss any support services provided;
- What factors contributed to the disruption;
- Key issues arising from this disruption – what can be learnt;
- Identify any future support needs for the child;
- Invite attendees to contribute their learning from the disruption discussion;
- Sum up at the end of the meeting and include any recurring themes, concerns, practice issues and recommendations;
- The child's daily lived experience whilst in the care of adopters.

15.1 Full minutes, covering every person's contribution, must be made of the Disruption Meeting. An experienced minute taker will be needed.

15.2 Minutes should be completed in a draft report and sent to the Chair within 10 working days of the meeting.

15.3 The Chair is responsible for checking the minutes of the Meeting together with their own summary.

15.4 Any policy or practice recommendations should only be sent to the Managers and Social Workers.

16. After the disruption - Prospective Adopter's Review

16.1 After the Disruption Meeting and the report being completed, there must be a review of the adopter(s) by the Adoption Manager. This should focus on the impact of the disruption and whether it is appropriate to recommend the continuing approval of the prospective adopters. It should be noted that some prospective adopter(s) have gone on from a disruption to create a successful family with other children.

17. Booking Process for Adoption Disruptions:

- 17.1 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 17.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 17.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

18. Monitoring and Review

- 18.1 This policy will be monitored and reviewed in order that its impact on the number of disruptions will be measured.
- 18.2 Learning points will be collated by the Regional Partnership.
- 18.3 A Policy review will be coordinated by the appropriate person from the Regional Partnership.

APPENDIX - Sample Letters

Letter to invite prospective adopters

Dear

As you will have been informed by your social worker, [name], it is Together4Children Permanency Partnership's practice to hold a disruption meeting whenever a child's placement has ended, in order to understand better what has happened and to plan for the future.

I have been asked to convene a meeting regarding [child's name] placement with you and am writing to invite you to attend.

The meeting will be held at [venue].

Meetings may take the best part of a day and there will be breaks for refreshments which will be provided. Your attendance will be very important and greatly valued.

I enclose brief information about the purpose of the disruption meeting and the proposed agenda. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with your social worker to discuss further.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

** to be determined for individual cases*

Letter to invite professionals

Dear

It is Together4Children Permanency Partnership's practice to hold a disruption meeting whenever a child's placement has ended, in order to understand better what has happened and to plan for the future.

I have been asked to convene a meeting regarding [name of child] and am writing to invite you to attend. Your contribution to the meeting would be greatly valued.

I enclose brief details about the purpose of the meeting and the proposed agenda.

These events usually take up a whole day; please let me know if you can only attend for half a day, or if you would prefer to limit your contribution to one specific session. You can reach me to discuss further on [telephone] number or you can email me [email address].



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I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

** to be determined for individual cases*

