



# Adoption Placement Planning

(Introductions to Prospective Adopters)

Policy and Procedure

**‘Communication is important, so information should be accessible to everyone. People with sensory communication disabilities may need documents in easy read, large print, audio or Braille formats for example. Others may need face to face communication support through a British Sign Language Interpreter, deafblind interpreter, lip speaker or note taker (as recommended by the NHS Accessible Information Standard). If someone speaks (or reads) a language that is not English, they will need to have the appropriate language-spoken language interpreter and / or text translator’.**



## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Regional staff for planning introductions for a child with prospective adopters and the formulation of a plan of introductions. To include potential meeting with birth family and prospective adopter(s) and contact with foster carer(s) following placement.

## 2. Underpinning Legislation and Guidance.

- 2.1
- Data Protection Act 2018
  - Adoption and Children Act 2002 Guidance Chapter 5
  - Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
  - Children and Adoption Act 2006
  - Equality Act 2010
  - The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
  - Statutory Guidance on Adoption Department of Education July 2013 (Draft update 2014)
  - Children and Families Act 2014
  - Care Planning & Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2015
  - S Beaumont and E Dibben (2017) Practice 64 – *Best Practice in meetings between prospective adopters and children prior to matching*. Coram BAAF. Available from: <https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/pn-64-best-practice-meetings-between-prospective-adopters-and-children-prior-matching>
  - Alan Burnell, Kathy Castell, & Gwen Cousins (2009) *Families Futures Practice Paper Series: Planning transitions for children moving to permanent placement; what do you do after you say hello*. Families Futures. Available from: <https://www.familyfutures.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Transitions-Practice-Paper.pdf>
  - Boswell, S., & Cudmore, L. (2014). 'The children were fine': acknowledging complex feelings in the move from foster care into adoption. *Adoption & Fostering*, 38(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575914522558>

## 3. Why is planning introductions to Prospective Adoptive Parents important?

- 3.1 Placement for adoption is intended to be the last of possibly many moves for the child and therefore should be planned with the upmost care. It is important to acknowledge that this will also be another separation for the child and so the child needs to be properly prepared and to understand, as far as their age and ability permits, why, what, when and how things will happen.

- 3.2 The period of introductions aims to:

- Facilitate the effective and smooth transfer of the physical and emotional care of the child from their current carers to their prospective adoptive parents to ensure that their specific needs are

- Provide an opportunity for the child and family to learn more about each other (e.g. routines, values, rules, roles, expectations,) as well as how they express their feelings, affection and disapproval
- Provide an opportunity to share reservations so that concerns can be aired and worked with. Professionals who are involved should acknowledge any concerns raised and provide opportunity for prospective adopters to air them.
- Prospective adopters should be supported in a decision to withdraw during introductions by all professionals involved and not feel criticised by professionals for doing so.
- Begin the process of developing emotional attachments and relationships.
- Enable foster carers to give permission to the child to move on
- Give careful consideration to the routines and care provided by the foster carer to ensure that the prospective adopters are providing care that is already familiar to the children to enable them to meet the child's needs during the introduction
- Enable prospective adopters to express their commitment to the child without rejecting his/her past
- Encourage foster carers and prospective adopters to work together and form a relationship which will enable ongoing contact when this is seen to be of benefit to the child (poor relations between foster carers and prospective adopters could be early indicators of later difficulties in sustaining the adoptive placement)
- Build upon the direct work undertaken with a child which will have prepared them for meeting their new prospective adoptive parent(s)

### **What are the guiding principles?**

3.3 The guiding principles **must always** be:

- What is best for the child
- What approach is most likely to achieve the smooth transfer of the physical and emotional care of the child from foster carers to the prospective adopters
- Children should be listened to when undertaking direct work/ preparation work with them in respect of placement moves
- Consideration should be given to a child's experience of trauma and the behaviours that may have presented early in a foster placement which may reappear in an adoptive placement.
- Ensure that all relevant information is shared with the prospective adopters in respect of the child/ren who are to be introduced to them
- To go at the pace of the child.

## **4. What is the process?**

4.1 Following Authority to place a child for Adoption or a Placement Order and the identification of prospective adopters for the child an **Adoption Placement Planning Meeting** (also referred to as Introductions Planning meeting) will be arranged by the Family Finding Practitioner for the child. This is the first stage of the transitional period; the purpose of the meeting is to develop, agree and draw

up a **Plan of Introductions**. The plan is developed in the child's best interest; it sets out how the period of transition will be managed, the anticipated timescales and responsibilities for making the plan a reality.

4.2 Other stages include the First Meeting, Midway Review, Final Review and Day of Placement. All will be considered in more depth in subsequent paragraphs.

#### **The Adoption Placement Planning Meeting**

4.3 An Adoption Placement Planning Meeting (in which the Plan of Introductions is drawn up and agreed) is usually held following **recommendation for approval of the match by the Adoption Panel and then ratification by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM)**. This is organised by a Family Finding Practitioner.

4.4 However, there may be circumstances in which the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting should take place prior to the ADM decision to avoid delay in the planning and placing arrangements for the child e.g. when a Fostering for Adoption placement is being considered for the child, or where the child is to be relinquished.

4.5 The meeting should be attended by:

- The Social Worker for the child
- The child's Family Finding Practitioner
- The child's current foster carer(s)
- The foster carer's Supervising Social Worker
- The prospective adoptive parent(s)
- The Social Worker for the prospective adoptive parent(s)
- The Family Finding Practitioner will request a Permanency Coordinator or a Senior Social Worker from the Adoption & Support Team to chair this meeting, and a record of the plan will be provided by the child's Family Finding Practitioner.

Birth relatives **should not** attend this meeting.

4.6 Prior to this meeting taking place, the Family Finding Practitioner and Child's Social Worker may prepare a provisional draft of the Plan of Introductions in readiness for the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting. This should also consider what other visits or meetings need to be built into the introduction period, if this has not already been completed prior to the Adoption Placement Planning meeting (e.g. meeting between prospective adopters and foster carers to share information about the child(ren), school visits, birth parent meeting with prospective adopters, prospective adopter's consultation with medical staff, including the Agency's Medical Advisor (if the child has particular medical needs). The provisional draft must be shared with the Chair of the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting before the actual meeting takes place, so appropriate consideration can be given to the proposed plan.

- 4.7 The purpose of this meeting is to develop and agree the Plan of Introductions. The responsibility for drawing up this plan is jointly held between the Adoption Team, Children's Team and the Fostering Service. The plan at this stage will be an outline and may be subject to change.
- 4.8 The Independent Reviewing Officer **must** be notified of the proposed date of placement by the Child's Social Worker and of any other changes that may occur to enable the review to take place within four weeks.
- 4.9 Any proposed change to the final plan of introductions must be negotiated by all parties. There will have been good reasons for planning the introductions as they were originally intended; there should be equally good reasons for changing any aspect of the plan. Should any issues arise by any party in respect of the plan these need to be raised with their Social Worker in the first instance. The person involved in chairing the meeting should be consulted if a change to the original plan is requested. It should also be made clear who is requesting this change i.e. prospective adopters or foster carers. Any anticipated change needs to be agreed by the Permanency Coordinator or the Assessment & Support Team Manager before any changes are implemented. Children's Team Managers don't usually attend these meetings so this should be the responsibility of the meeting chair to agree any changes or the Adoption Assessment & Support Team Manager in the chair's absence.

## 5. Preparing for the Planning Meeting

- 5.1 Key areas for preparation include the identification of:
- Significant dates for the child (birthday, school holidays, medical appointments etc)
  - For children with disabilities – significant forthcoming appointments that will need to be coordinated and planned
  - School placement changes and any requirement of PEP to support any school move
  - The foster carers, their Supervising Social Worker and prospective adopter's Social Worker's commitments
  - The notice period the prospective adopters need to give to their employers to be entitled to adoption leave. If significant costs are identified regarding prospective adopter's accommodation, travel, for the purpose of introductions, this will require approval by appropriate Manager.
  - Ensuring the correct equipment is in place, that it has been ordered and will be in situ by the time overnight stays commence
  - The same consideration and process should be followed for foster carers.
- 5.2 There should be discussions with the foster carers and prospective adopters about which of them manages the child's needs at each stage of the introductions and when this role is transferred to the prospective adopters. This should minimise any uncertainty or awkwardness, especially when the prospective adopters are in the foster carer's home.

- 5.3 Careful consideration should be given to how children who are already living in the foster carer' or prospective adopter's household are included in the introductions and prepared for the child's move.
- 5.4 It is essential to ensure that the child, foster carers and prospective adopters are well supported by their respective Social Workers. The child should be seen separately by their Social Worker, and for siblings each child should be seen individually.
- 5.5 If the child is currently placed with siblings who are not moving with the child, the introductions will need to be explained so that they have an understanding of what is happening for their brother/sister(s).
- 5.6 Introductions at times of heightened emotional significance (birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries of deaths etc) should be avoided.
- 5.7 Term-time introductions can be helpful as the child has the stimulation they need during the day. Prospective adoptive parents can then concentrate on evenings and weekends to build relationships.

## 6. Interagency Placements

- 6.1 For interagency adoption placements the Permanency Coordinator/Senior Social Worker will complete the **CORAM BAAF Interagency** (IA) form and seek authorisation by the Senior Manager. The Family Finding Practitioner should complete the Plan of Introductions documentation, ensuring this has been signed off by the Chair or Adoption Team Coordinator/Manager/Senior Practitioner before circulating this to all participants within five working days after the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting has taken place and especially before the introductions begin

## 7. Timescales and Constraints

- 7.1 Before setting a timescale for introductions it is important to be aware of any factors that might impact on the timing and design of introductions as outlined in paragraphs 5.1.
- 7.2 Realistically, there will often be influences or pressures which will have some bearing on the planning of introductions. It is essential that these do not result in introductions being rushed or precipitate action which may be detrimental to the child and prospective adopters. Research shows that poorly planned or rushed introductions could compromise the stability and potential of the placement from the outset and can be a precursor to a potential breakdown later in the adoptive placement.
- 7.3 The approximate duration of introductions will be shaped by the unique circumstances of each child, including their age, developmental stage and understanding and whether they are being placed with siblings.

7.4 Consideration should be given to whether it would be appropriate for 'soft introductions' i.e. prospective adopters meet the child prior to the commencement of an intensive period of introductions without care giving responsibilities.

7.5 The length of introductions will differ depend on the needs of the child, their age, and their understanding and there may be the need for flexibility in introductions for certain children to include overnight stays.

## 8. Siblings

8.1 Give extra time to planning introductions for siblings. If siblings have been previously placed together it is usual for their introductions to take place jointly. If they have been living separately careful consideration should be given to the pros and cons of staggering the introductions. Issues to consider will include:

- The quality of the relationship between the children
- Their level of contact
- Their ages and individual needs
- The experience and parenting ability of the adopters.
- The distance between foster home and adoptive home.
- If siblings have lived apart then they may need the opportunity to emotionally reconnect prior to moving to the adoptive placement.
- For siblings who are not living together the introductory period may need to be extended and may need to include overnight stays with prospective adopters. This will provide time in order to be confident about the sibling's ability to share the prospective adopter's time and attention.

## 9. Communication

9.1 The period of introductions can be stressful for all concerned. One way to minimise this is to ensure that there is clear and frequent communication between all those involved in the process. This may happen more readily between each party and their respective Social Worker, but it will be vital for the Social Workers to be in regular contact with each other throughout the process and for the working relationship between the foster carers and prospective adopters to be nurtured and encouraged.

9.2 It will be important for the child to be aware of what is happening. It is important that foster carers, prospective adopters and child (at an age appropriate level) understand the purpose of the introductions.

9.3 Plans must be clearly written down for all parties (times, venues, approximate duration of visits etc.). The plan should include the reasons for the decisions so that everyone is clear why the process is being managed in this way. The child should be given a timetable of the introductions in a creative, child friendly form, so that she/he can understand the process, by the Child Social Worker.



9.4 The prospective adopters are encouraged to prepare a family book which can be shared with the child ahead of their first meeting. The creation of a talking book may also be useful for a younger child and adoption Workers can advise on these.

9.5 The availability of appropriate media resources and photographs of the prospective adopters to be provided to the foster carers, this can also help non-verbal children recognise the prospective adopters when they arrive at the foster home for the first meeting.

## **10. Placements at a Distance**

10.1 Interagency or long-distance placements present additional challenges and may impact on introductions in the following ways:

- The pace and “shape” of introductions may be influenced by the distances to be travelled
- The periods of contact with the child when introductions are based within the region may be longer and more intensive
- In addition to contact time with the child, meetings with birth parents or other relatives, nursery or school teacher, other siblings etc. add to the intensity
- There are potentially fewer opportunities for prospective adopters to have a breathing space to reflect and take stock. This is also more difficult when they are not in their own home
- When visits transfer to the prospective adopter’s home, there will be an expectation that foster carers may need to stay in the area of the prospective adopter’s home for at least a few days. During this time, foster carers may be required to occupy their own time whilst in the area to allow more “alone time” between the child and prospective adopters. The foster carers will be required to be available to attend the final review of the introductions before returning home
- The change of environment may be even more marked for the child who moves to a different part of the country.
- The needs of any other children within the foster placement may also need to be taken into account.
- If there is any opportunity it may be an idea for prospective adopters to spend some time before introductions commence, in the community that the child originates from to get a sense and feel of what life is like in that community and culture.

10.2 When planning introductions for such placements, Social Workers should be aware of the above issues and the potential risks they pose. Every effort should be made to ensure that these do not compromise the process.

## **11. The First Meeting**

11.1 After the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting has been completed and the timetable for introductions has been agreed, the first formal meeting between the child and prospective adopters can be held. The following factors could be considered

- The Planning Meeting does not need to be rushed
- Everyone has time to “digest” the plan for introductions
- The first meeting can take place when the child and prospective adopters are “fresh” rather than at the end of a long and tiring day
- Consideration also needs to be given to whether relationships have already been established through soft introductions/pre meets or prior contact with foster carers and adopters
- Offers foster carers the chance for final preparation of the child before the meeting takes place

11.2 Whatever is decided about the timing of the first meeting, it is essential that everyone involved has been prepared for this.

11.3 The first formal meeting usually lasts for no more than a couple of hours and takes place in the foster carer’s home with the foster carer present. However, this would again depend on whether soft introductions have taken place. The Child’s Social Worker should also be present initially to “introduce” the child to the prospective adopters but may then leave if this seems appropriate.

11.4 Prospective adopters may be surprised if they are immediately welcomed by the child as “Mummy” or “Daddy”. It is important that they are made aware in advance of the possible emotional impact this may have on them at this very sensitive time.

## **12. Meetings with Birth-Parents/Other Birth Relative**

12.1 There are significant benefits in holding such meetings for both the prospective adopters and the child, particularly if there is going to be some form of ongoing contact. Prospective adopters are expected to meet the birth parent(s) or other birth relatives of the child whenever circumstances permit this and will be supported in this by the Adoption Social Worker and the Child’s Social Worker.

12.2 Prospective adopters may also meet siblings of the child who are in other placements. Again, this will be particularly important in setting the scene for future contact.

12.3 Such meetings are often built into the process of introductions and can add significantly to the stress of this very intense period, depending on the number of birth relatives involved and the outcome of the meetings. It may be appropriate to hold some or all of these meetings at this stage, but careful consideration should be given to this and other options discussed if relevant

12.4 Whenever they occur, meetings between the prospective adopters and birth relative must be carefully planned, structured and supervised.

## **13. Meetings with Other Professionals**

13.1 Prospective adopters may also need to meet with a variety of other professionals who are involved with the child. Again, this will require careful and sensitive planning to avoid them feeling overwhelmed during the introductions.

## **Overnight Stays**

13.2 When the introductions shift to the prospective adopter's home, the issue of overnight stays arises. Although these are often not used for younger children because it may be difficult to explain what is happening, for older children there may well be a logical progression in building up the time spent alone with the prospective adopters in their home as the introductions move towards placement. As with many other aspects of the introduction process this issue should be considered in the light of the two guiding principles mentioned earlier. That is:

- What is best for the child; and
- The approach which is most likely to achieve the smooth transfer of the physical and emotional care of the child from foster carers to the prospective adopters.

## **14. Space to Reflect**

14.1 In many cases the relatively short, intense period of introductions represents the culmination of months or years of waiting and there can be pressures, both internal and external, which make people feel that they just want to "get on with it". Because of this the process of introductions tends to develop its own momentum, but for all concerned, particularly the child and prospective adopters, the stakes are high.

14.2 The impact of introducing a child to a potential new family cannot be underestimated and it is essential that there are plenty of opportunities for reflection and "taking stock". For the prospective adopters in particular this is an emotional experience as the child becomes a real person to them.

14.3 It is therefore essential that opportunities to reflect are built into the timetable for introductions when these are being planned. These can be as important as the actual contact times with the child and should be seen as a legitimate part of the process rather than delays to the placement date. These "pauses" should be used by everyone involved in the introductions to check out how the introductions are progressing and their own personal part in the process. However, those involved need to be mindful that the length of introductions are within the child's timetable.

14.4 Social Workers should be in regular contact with the child, foster carers and prospective adopters throughout the process, and should make good use of the "pauses" built into the introductions. In addition, they must ensure a high level of communication between themselves so that any issues can be picked up and dealt with quickly.

## **15. Roles and Responsibilities**

15.1 The child's Social Worker is responsible for:

- Helping the child to express what he/she feels about leaving the current carer

- Helping the child to ask any questions they may have about the proposed prospective adopters and to think about their feelings
- 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
- Listening to what the child is saying, but the adults must make the final decision
- Identifying with the child and the foster carers transitional objects which may assist the child to move with minimal distress to the prospective adopter's care
- Ensuring that the Social Workers for any other LAC children in the same foster placement are alerted to the plan for introductions so they can support and reassure these children
- Ensuring frequent and accessible lines of communication will all parties involved with the introductions
- All children depending on their age and understanding should have had some level of preparation work before they are placed for adoption. The life story book and later life letter should be ready in draft form by the first adoption LAC review and completed and handed to the adopters within 10 days of the Celebration Hearing
- Ensuring that the child's personal education plan supports the transition arrangements
- Ensure sufficient formal notice is given to foster carer's Fostering Agency to end the fostering placement e.g. at least 28 days is required
- Ensure that formal notification of placement date is given to business support to be loaded on IT system and for notification of placement letter to be sent out with accompanying documentation e.g. copy of Adoption Placement Plan

The more involved and prepared the child is for the move, the more likely it is that this will be successful, providing a good start to the placement.

## 16. **Foster Carers**

16.1 Foster carers support is crucial to adoptive placement success. The foster carers responsibilities are to:

- Highlight any events for themselves or the child which may impact on any proposed plan of introductions e.g. planned holidays, birthdays etc.
- Provide positive reassurance to the child about the move, for some children visual aids may be helpful e.g. the use of calendars
- Help the child to ask any questions they may have and provide reassurance and answers to these where possible, and where not immediately to advise the child's Social Worker

- Help the child to express any feelings e.g. worries, fears, happiness they may have, and share these with the child's Social Worker
- Share with the Child's Social Worker / their Supervising Social Worker any changes to the child's presentation/ behaviour
- Help the child to think about what it is important to take with them from the current placement and ensure these are appropriately packed for the move when the timescale for this has been agreed
- Identify with the child any transitional objects which may assist the child to move with minimal distress to the prospective adopter's care
- Managing adult emotions about the move of the child when in the child's company
- Ensure that any life story information and children's memory boxes are up to date to be able to share with the prospective adopters.
- Ensure open lines of communication with all those involved in the introductions
- Be prepared to spend time in the prospective adopter's location by being close by to aid the transition process
- Offer advice and guidance to support the prospective adopters in understanding the child's needs and routines
- Alert the Child's Social Worker and Chair of the introduction planning meeting regarding any changes observed or required or indeed any other issues.

4.46 Foster carers are in the best position to pick up on the child's feelings during the introductions but may also have support needs of their own. It is important that they are encouraged to share both with the relevant Social Workers. The child's Social Worker and supervising Social Worker should be proactive in identifying any needs by ensuring they maintain regular contact with the child and foster carers throughout the process and by sharing issues and concerns.

## **17. Prospective Adopters**

17.1 The prospective adopters and their Social Worker are responsible for:

- Being prepared to spend time, in the locality of the foster carer's home to familiarise themselves with the child, and his/her routines and needs. The timing of the stay will depend on the age, needs and circumstances of the child, but this could be up to at least a week.
- Highlighting any events for themselves or children already in their home which may impact on any proposed plan of introductions e.g. planned holidays, birthdays etc.
- Ensuring open lines of communication with all those involved in the introductions
- Helping the child to ask any questions they may have and provide reassurance and answers to these where possible, and where not, to advise the child's Social Worker
- Helping the child to express any feelings e.g. worries, fears, happiness they may have, and share these with the child's Social Worker

- Sharing with the child's Social Worker / their supervising Social Worker any changes to the child's presentation/ behaviour
  - Helping the child to express what he/she feels about leaving their foster carer/ birth family
  - Containing significant adult feelings/ emotions when in the child's company but ensuring these are shared with their adoption Social Worker
  - Making themselves (and any child in their care) available to allow for introductions to take place as per this guidance and in a timely fashion
  - Alerting the child's Social Worker, adoption Social Worker and Chair of the introduction planning meeting regarding any changes observed or required or indeed any other issues
  - Ensure their home is ready and suitably equipped to receive the child.
- 17.2 It is essential that prospective adopters and their Social Workers remain in close contact throughout the introductions. If the prospective adopters are a couple, the Social Worker must speak to each of them individually, as well as together. This recognises that partners will be affected differently and may experience different reactions to the child. These individual responses can be "hidden" in a joint discussion, but may be critical to the proposed placement.
- 17.3 Prospective adopters should be encouraged by their Worker to share any issues or concerns they have. It is natural for them to have anxieties when faced with the reality of assuming full responsibility for a child who is still very much a stranger to them. The Social Worker should not minimise such anxieties, even if their professional experience suggests that this is normal. The Social Worker should, however, be sensitive to comments which may indicate that real doubts are emerging in the prospective adopters. It is always better to pause and re-plan the timetable to give time for issues to be addressed, than it is to plough ahead regardless and risk inflicting emotional damage on the child and/or prospective adopters.
- 17.4 Consideration must be given to the impact of introductions on the prospective adopter's emotional well-being. Equally, professionals have a responsibility to ensure they are looking after their own well-being and are seeking the appropriate support through colleagues and their line-manager.
- 18. Midway Review**
- 18.1 The Midway Review meeting provides a formal opportunity to pause, explore feelings, monitor the progress of introductions, re-plan if necessary and confirm the placement date.
- 18.2 It is strongly recommended that there should always be a meeting as opposed to telephone calls to confirm whether the placement should go ahead as provisionally agreed. A meeting gives everybody concerned the chance to come together and reach an informed decision, providing the opportunity to clarify any outstanding issues or actions. Those attending the meeting should where ever possible be the same people that attended the original Adoption Placement Planning Meeting.

- 18.3 The venue and timing of the Midway Review is to be considered at the Adoption Placement Planning meeting. The meeting should be arranged to enable all key people to attend.
- 18.4 A review at the end of the introduction phase held before the child is officially placed will allow there to be a view as to whether the child needs any more time familiarising themselves with their prospective adopters, and the prospective adopters with the child. A decision should be made in the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting as to whether this review should take place within a formal meeting or via other communication means e.g. telephone, Skype etc. It is important that the Fostering supervising Social Worker provides feedback to the Chair prior to the final review taking place. Minutes should be written up and placed on the child's file especially where there has been a change to the Adoption Placement Plan.
- 18.5 Professionals must be confident in the information and feedback they receive in respect of the adoptive placement being made and remain open to 'all possibilities' in respect of this.
- 18.6 Prospective adopters should feel able to say 'the unsayable' to ensure all issues that may impact on a successful placement are fully explored and addressed.

## **19. Day of Placement**

- 19.1 The physical transition of the child from the foster carers to prospective adopters is always marked by a mixture of feelings for all concerned.
- 19.2 Because of the high emotional impact of this time it is crucial that there has been thorough preparation beforehand and that everyone is aware of how the move will take place.
- 19.3 It is normal practice for the prospective adopters to move the child from the foster home; this is seen as them positively "claiming" the child and in most circumstances will coincide with the foster carers giving the "blessing" to the child's new family. If the introductions have been successful and the timing is right, it is likely that managing the move in this way will give the strongest positive message to the child that "we are now responsible for you and want you to be part of our family". Emotionally, prospective adopters sometimes feel that they are "stealing" the child from loving carers who have given their all to the child and will need to be supported and reassured by their Social Worker.
- 19.4 Occasionally, circumstances may result in the foster carers taking the child to the prospective adopter's home as a way of achieving the placement. Whilst this may convey the message to the child that "we trust these people to care for you", it may also be perceived by the child as being abandoned by trusted carers and may make a positive transition more difficult to achieve. If a move is planned in this way, there should be good reasons for it, the child should be fully aware of what is happening and why, and it may be necessary for foster carers to have the support of their supervising Social Worker.

- 19.5 If prospective adopters do not have their own transport this does not automatically mean that the foster carers should take the child to their new home. Careful consideration will need to be given to how best to manage the move; for example, providing a hire car if one of the prospective adopters is a driver, the child's Social Worker taking them to the station or driving to the new family home.
- 19.6 It is usual for moves to be achieved by the prospective adopters arriving at the foster home early in the day, spending just a short time with the foster carers and then leaving with the child. Prolonged farewells are difficult for all concerned.
- 19.7 Opinions are mixed about whether or not Social Workers should be present when the child moves and if so which Social Worker/s; some feel this can be intrusive and that the foster carers and prospective adopters should be allowed to manage this themselves; others feel that it is important for a Social Worker to be present, even if only in the background, to facilitate the move. However, it is essential that a Social Worker is present. There needs to be an agreed position as to who will be present. Ideally, the most appropriate person would be the child's Social Worker, however, if he/she is not available then the Foster carers Social Worker can be present at the time of the move.
- 19.8 The decision may rest on some of the following issues:
- How experienced the foster carers are in moving children onto adoption
  - How difficult the foster carers will find it to say goodbye to the child, especially if they had expressed an interest in adopting the child themselves or have formed a strong emotional bond
  - How confident or comfortable the prospective adopters feel in achieving the move without a Worker being present
  - How significant the child's relationship with their Social Worker is to them, and whether this could facilitate the transition between sets of carers
- 19.9 The decision should never be based on the fact that a Social Worker is unavailable because it has been decided to place the child at a weekend.
- 19.10 The foster carer's supervising Social Worker should agree with them in advance how and when they will be in touch after the move has taken place. In some cases the Social Worker may need to visit as soon as the child has moved, but at the very least there should be telephone contact or a visit on the day of the move.
- 19.11 The prospective adopter's Social Worker should contact them by prior agreement on the day of the move. This is likely to be later in the day or in the evening once the child is in bed.
- 19.12 The child's Social Worker will visit the child with the prospective adopters on the day of the placement to confirm the placement and complete the Placement Plan document.



## **20. Post-Placement Contact with Foster Carers**

- 20.1 In recognition of the important relationship that often exists between foster carers and the child, and to reassure the child once he/she has moved on, it is usual to plan some form of contact once the child has moved on to their adoptive family. This may be by telephone initially, but often the foster carers will visit the child at a neutral venue or in their new home. There is no set time for this visit to take place, but the timing does need to be based on what is right for the child.
- 20.2 Plans will need to be made before the child is placed so that all parties share the same understanding of what will happen in terms of contact. It is not necessarily straightforward to leave this to foster carers and prospective adopters to organise themselves once the child has been placed. Both parties may find it difficult to keep to previous agreements for their own personal reasons or because they believe that it is not in the child's best interests. Unless the latter point can be substantiated, it is the role of the child's Social Worker to ensure that contact takes place as planned. Further work may need to be undertaken with the foster carers and/or prospective adopters by their own Social Workers to facilitate this.
- 20.3 Statutory reviews after placement will consider all aspects of contact, including those with foster carers, and this is an appropriate forum in which to confirm the timing of a visit from foster carers to the child in their new home.

## **21. Placements that do not go Ahead**

- 21.1 Although relatively unusual, it is possible that either prospective adopters or professionals involved in introductions may consider that the placement should not proceed. Clearly such a decision will not be made lightly by any party involved, and the wishes and feelings of the prospective adopters must be respected. Whilst a difficult time for all concerned, it is better to end introductions and deal with the consequences than to proceed to placement and risk an early disruption.

## **22. Complaint /dispute Resolution**

- 22.1 Potentially disputes / complaints could arise from any party involved in the introductions process. It is the responsibility of all parties to ensure that disputes / complaints are resolved as quickly as possible to ensure that the Introduction process runs smoothly. Each Locality Hub should follow their Local Authority complaints procedures.