



**Adoption
Central
England**

Practice Guidance

**Supporting transitions to an
adoptive family**



1. Introduction

The aim of the transitions period is to promote the adopters' bond to the child and the child's attachment to their new adoptive family. Essential to this process is to support the child in developing a sense of safety and trust with their adoptive parents alongside their foster carers giving them permission to move on.

Traditionally when a child moves from foster care into adoption, the transition period tends to take place within a tight timeframe usually between seven and fourteen days. Often there is no contact between the child and the foster carer for several months after the move, if at all. Very little attention or research had been aimed at understanding the rationale for these procedures but this is changing.

This practice guidance is based on an approach advocated by Family Place, combining elements of Theraplay® (Jernberg, 1979) and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (Hughes, 2006). It is influenced by current research on transitions and in particular the research paper by Boswell and Cudmore (2014); '**The children were fine**', that acknowledged the complex feelings involved for the child in moving from foster care into adoption. This practice guidance also incorporates helpful resources developed by Devon County Council Adoption Team.

2. Guiding principles

Boswell and Cudmore (2014) in their research study recommend:

"Ideally there should be an expectation that when babies and children are moved from foster carers to adoptive parents it should be done gradually, like a careful weaning...such separations should be treated as emotionally significant for the child, whether the child concerned is able to show feelings of distress or not.

...It should be taken as a given that the child's relationship with their foster carer is important and will remain important. The foster carer and her family should be allowed to remain present and important in the child's life during the move and for a

long time after it. Ongoing visits from foster carers should be welcomed and encouraged, as soon and as frequently as possible, gradually being reduced as the child begins to settle in their new home.

Where this is impossible, all of the adults involved should be absolutely committed to ensuring that the relationship with the former carer remains alive in everybody's minds, in whatever way this is possible. This could be through phone calls between child and carer, through text messages, emails, Skype, the sharing of photos, through talking about the former carers and families; giving a clear and consistent message that it is natural to miss absent loved ones, and that the adoptive parents not only expect this but can tolerate and help them with it.

All of this can be emotionally demanding for adopters and for foster carers, and requires exceptional reserves of personal strength and resilience, not to mention self-confidence. The role of social workers is crucial in helping all the parties involved to manage their feelings and anxieties in what is bound to be a turbulent and emotional time, keeping the message alive that this is painful but important, and that feelings are better expressed than hidden.

And we believe that if adults can embrace the belief that ongoing contact is beneficial for children, even if it reveals feelings of distress which would otherwise be hidden, children will feel that their feelings can be understood and contained by those caring for them, and this will give them a powerful message of acceptance and love.”



The transition period reflected in the approach taken by ACE with partner local authorities has three significant stages in which a number of important key activities take place:

Stage One: Linking pre-matching panel

This stage is focused on ensuring that the prospective adopters become familiar with the child's lived experiences and current and potential future needs. It begins the crucial relationship between the foster carers and prospective adopters to work together to support the child during the transition. This stage can include:

- 1a) Pre-placement meetings
- 1b) A Life Appreciation Day
- 1c) Pre meets between the child and prospective adopters.

Stage Two: Transitions

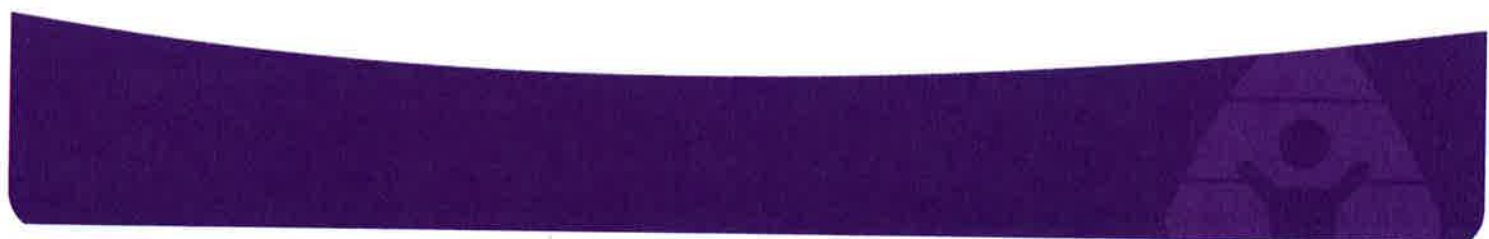
Fundamentally, transitions begin the process of building additional attachments by helping the child to develop trust and feelings of safety towards their new carers. This covers:

- 2a) The Placement Planning Meeting and the development of the Transition Plan
- 2b) Review of transitions.

Stage Three: Placement and beyond

The period following transitions is important for continuing to support the child in building a sense of safety and security. This stage includes plans for the continuation of contact with their foster carers:

- 3a) Key concepts for the adoptive family
- 3b) Contact plans.



Stage One: Linking pre-matching panel

1a) Pre-placement meeting (Appendix 1)

The child's social worker and their line manager are responsible for deciding the most appropriate placement for the child/ren. Once a child is linked to their potential adoptive family, a meeting between the child's foster carers and potential adopters is arranged and supported by the child's social worker and the adoption social worker. The child should not be present for this meeting.

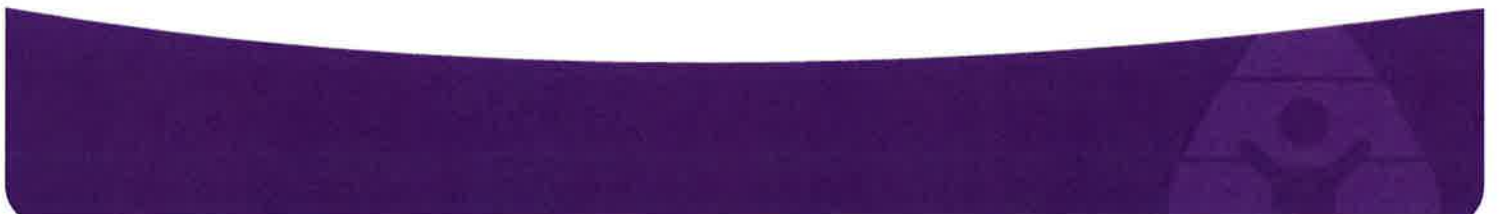
The aim of this meeting is to start the transfer of key information to the prospective adopters.

This is also the beginning of the crucial relationship between the foster carers and the adoptive parents.

This meeting should include a discussion about:

- The child's history in detail including how the child presented when first placed and the developments since then;
- Routines, likes and dislikes and how these are managed;
- Any difficulties, past and present, that the child has/is experiencing;
- The child's attachment style and needs; how they relate to people;
- How they cope and manage change;
- How the foster carers support and manage the child's emotions and behaviour;
- What preparation has been completed with the child and their awareness of their plan of adoption, including any differing plans for siblings.

At this meeting, there is potential for differing expectations and emotions for all parties involved and this should be acknowledged.



For the foster carers, the process may be viewed with a mixture of pride in a job well done, happiness for the child in having a 'growing up family' found for them, and sadness about the child moving on from their care.

The prospective adopters may be overjoyed at hearing about their new child, but also have feelings of anxiety about spending time with foster carers who will be 'experts' in the care of the child, spending time in a stranger's home and the feeling of being observed by a number of people.

For the child the move may be terrifying and may even reactivate previous emotional traumas. Mixed feelings about moving need to be acknowledged and recognised as normal and expected.

Share Appendix 2: Transitions information for foster carers

Share Appendix 3: Transitions Information for prospective adopters

1b) Life Appreciation Day (Appendix 4)

This is an opportunity for the prospective adopters to meet as many professionals involved in the child's journey so far. It is an opportunity for the prospective adopters to ask questions about the child and their birth family, and to get a better idea of the challenges they may face as the child grows up. It provides a detailed window into the child's lived experiences including significant losses, moves and change.

It allows the prospective adopters to gradually build up and absorb the layers of information available and have as full a picture as possible of the child before attending matching panel. The day will provide a timeline of the child's journey so far, which will help the adopters to provide a narrative to the child of their journey throughout their lives.

Life appreciation days also aid the understanding of a child's attachment patterns with their birth family and foster carer and the type of parenting they are likely to need. It can also help prospective adopters identify any potential triggers for a child from their history.

When will it be held?

A life appreciation day should be held for **all** children over the age of 3 or for younger children where they have experienced a high number of moves and for sibling group placements of three or more children. It should be held once a match has been identified and prior to matching panel.

Arrangements for the day

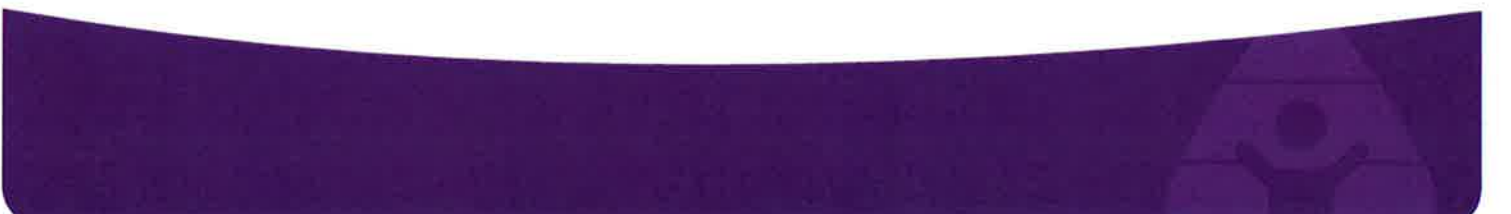
The meeting should be coordinated by the child's social worker and chaired by an ACE team manager.

The child's social worker is responsible for arranging the life appreciation day and will need to identify a suitable venue, refreshments, appropriate participants, send out invites and prepare a family tree and timeline in advance of the day. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to ensure that a minute taker is arranged.

The adoption social worker will need to prepare the prospective adopters for the life appreciation day. The prospective adopters and current foster carers should have had the opportunity to meet or have a telephone discussion prior the life appreciation day.

Who should be invited?

The child's social worker, adoption social worker, foster carers and prospective adopters must attend. Other possible attendees include:



- current and previous school/nursery teacher
- previous foster carers or respite carers
- previous social workers/family support workers/contact supervisors
- current and previous health visitors or health professionals
- independent reviewing officers
- therapists
- Any other adult who may have played a significant role in the child's life

Structure of the day

The child's social worker and family finder/adoption social worker will prepare for the meeting and provide a visual timeline of significant events and moves in a child's life with photographs if possible.

The chair will ensure that introductions are made and that the expectations and ground rules of the day are clear. They will ensure that confidentiality agreements are signed by all participants.

The day will follow a timeline of the child's history, where possible, so that information is presented in chronological order. Minutes of the life appreciation day will be sent to the prospective adopters and put on the child's file within 6 weeks.

1c) Pre meets between the child and prospective adopters

Pre-meets take place prior to the match being presented to adoption panel and aim to facilitate a more gradual period of introductions between the child and their prospective adopters. It is likely that pre-meets will be used more for children whose specific circumstances require the prospective adopters to have the opportunity to get to know and understand the children/ren better. Also where it is felt that prospective adopters would benefit from a meeting/s, to help them become more

informed about a child's specific emotional or health needs or behaviours prior to the match decision. This area of practice has developed since Adoption Activity Days which promote direct face-to-face interaction between children and prospective adopters. It is crucial that there is proper preparation for all those involved and good practice dictates that we work at all times to provide transparency and openness in our work with children.

The following is taken from the CoramBAAF Practice note 64: **Best practice in meetings between prospective adopters and children prior to matching**

- Pre-meet opportunities are not a “trial run”, but rather an opportunity to further cement the link between the child and prospective adopters, to seek additional observational evidence ahead of the matching panel, and to reduce the risks of an early disruption due to unrealistic expectations or a failed “chemistry” between the prospective adopters and the child.
- Managing the emotional risks for children, foster carers and prospective adopters is a challenge. Understanding and responding to the expectations and anxieties of all participants is key to the success of transitions that involve pre-meets.
- It is hoped that the process of an early meeting or introducing children to adopters at a slower pace than during traditional introductions will be less intensive and emotionally draining, enabling a more natural rapport to be formed between the child and adopters.
- The suggested length of a pre-meet is between 30 and 60 minutes, if the interactions between the prospective adopters and child are natural and progressing well. The quality of the interactions could affect the outcomes; if the meeting needs to be shortened, this is fine.

- The meeting location should be child-friendly, not too busy and in an environment that is not too distracting for the child. There should be an element of privacy for all parties.
- The meeting should be in a place that is seen as safe, informal and familiar by the child – perhaps at a soft play centre, outdoor play park or community farm. Remember, the pre-meet opportunity may only lend itself to an observation, without an expectation of interaction.
- For the purpose of a one-off pre-meet, other children (for example, prospective adopters' birth children or foster carers' birth children) should not attend. Managing expectations for all, as well as the impending impact of loss for other parties, needs preparation. Keep distractions and the need to supervise other children to a minimum.
- These pre-meets will not be right or necessary for all children being placed for adoption and there should be careful consideration about whether such meetings should be used, on a case-by-case basis. They can provide more opportunity for reflection, for questions to be explored and for child-friendly explanation and reassurance to be provided and accepted as good practice.

Stage Two: Transitions

Following the matching panel and ADM decision, information about the prospective adoptive family can be shared with the child. This may include a family book, photographs and videos to introduce the family to the child. Consideration also needs to be given to the sensory experiences of the child. Whilst there may be a temptation to consider that the child is having a new beginning, what they need is the

reassurance and sensory memory of their time with their primary carers with its familiar sights, sounds, and smells moving with them for example taking the child's bedding to their new home, so they have a familiar texture and smell next to them when they first sleep in an essentially unfamiliar environment.

2a) Placement Planning Meeting and Transition Plan

This meeting is chaired by an ACE team manager and is attended by the child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their adoption social worker, the foster carers and their fostering social worker and the ACE family finding social worker (where applicable).

The aim of the Transition Plan (Appendix 5) is to introduce the child to their adoptive family and to begin the process of integration. The draft Transition Plan should be drawn up in advance of the planning meeting by the adoption social worker / family finding social worker in consultation with the child's social worker, foster carers and prospective adopters. At the Placement Planning Meeting, the draft plan can be adjusted with changes that reflect the needs of the child, and the needs of the foster carers and adopters.

There are some key aspects that are critical in this process:

- The transitions must be carefully thought through and carried out at the child's pace. This means that even if a plan is approved, it is 'live', in as much as it is ever evolving, according to the needs of the child. It is not suitable for the plan to include sessions where the child is left alone with the prospective adopters during the first couple of days or even the first week of introductions.

- There is no standard timescale for the length of transitions. It can take up to six weeks, and even longer for older children if necessary. Transitions may begin with gradual playdates several days/weeks apart.
- During this period, both the child and the adults take time to adjust to and process new relationships. They need an adequate period of adjustment and integration to get to know each other. This should include days for reflection.
- The transitions should build up in time and intensity. Beginning with a brief hello (of about an hour at the child's current home) and moving towards time spent in the child's new home with their foster carers present. Additional to this is an increase in presence of the child's new parents, with a subsequent decrease in presence of the child's foster carers.
- Transitions are best if they allow for the child to continue experiencing as close to normal routines as possible - no new and exciting trips to adventure play parks for example!
- The foster carers and adopters need to talk to the child throughout, to acknowledge the process and provide information on what will be happening next. If the child is younger, they can discuss this out loud with each other in front of the child, so that the child can hear and absorb the information. For an older child, and with the foster carer, they could create a planner with pictures and/or writing to explain what they will be doing for each day.
- The transitions need to be well supported with regular support from social workers and therapeutic support (if identified). Where there is already therapeutic support in place for the child, the provider of the therapy should be



included in the transition planning and ensure that any endings are made appropriately (as required) and are included within the Transition Plan.

- The Transition Plan should also take account of a child's need to say goodbye to his/her school, and other regular activities, such as after school clubs, depending on their age and need. There may be future opportunities for a significant adult, such as a teacher to visit the child, once placed with their adoptive family, in order to support them in managing feelings of loss around their previous school or activities.
- Final contact with the child's birth parents, siblings and/or other significant family members should have taken place prior to matching panel.
- For placements which are further away, there is an expectation that the child's foster carer would travel and stay local to the prospective adopter's home to support the transitions transferring to their new home.

2b) Mid-way review (Appendix 6)

This should take place in a setting that allows all involved to speak openly and honestly; this may be a local office or the foster carers' home if appropriate. This review is an opportunity to consider how the transitions are progressing and, if necessary, make changes to the Transition Plan.

The mid-way review is chaired by an ACE team manager and will include all those involved in the Placement Planning Meeting.

The child's social worker in consultation with the foster carers should ensure that they have sought the views of the child on the progress of the transitions - these should be verbal views for older children and observations for younger children. These views are necessary to be shared within the review.

If the adopters are expressing uncertainty and doubt during introductions it is better to slow down the process rather than continue at the same pace, which may lead to a disruption in the future; a situation which is much harder to untangle and will have a much more long-lasting impact on the child.

No matter how young a child is they will still have a sense of what is happening and will be feeling unsettled and insecure. If they have been with the foster carers for a period, then they will be feeling grief and loss for them as well as their birth family. If the child appears to be taking it in their stride, it does not mean that the child is fine and that introductions should be shortened. Research shows that in a very high percentage of cases where adoptions have sadly disrupted, *one of the consistent factors has been that transitions were too short, rushed, badly planned or not supported and adopters didn't feel comfortable in taking the child home.*

2c) Placement Day

On placement day this should be a short handover, no more than 30 minutes with the child's social worker being present to make the official placement. All preparation should have taken place during the transition period with only an overnight bag needing to go with the child on the day of placement.

The foster carers should not include any extended family or neighbours on placement day and should ensure that they manage their own emotions for the benefit of the child. Should the foster carers require support this should be in place after the placement has been made and not before the child and adopters have left their home.



Stage Three: Placement and beyond

3a) Key concepts for the adoptive family (included in Appendix 3)

Focus on the smaller family unit

The focus needs to be kept on the smaller family unit for a sustained period of time, depending on the child's needs and adopter's needs. The role of the family and parents needs to be highlighted to the child on an ongoing basis and in a low-key gentle manner, linking the role back to the 'keeping safe' message from the life story books. The emphasis needs to be on family activities, games and routines.

However, it is also recognised that single adopters may well need support sooner. In these circumstances, we advise that they only introduce initial and limited back-up carers, such as grandparents, and also, at first, limit the time of any such introduction, ensuring they keep their focus on the child's needs.

Low-key and calm routines

The low-key, calming routines and activities from the transitions period should be continued; such as going to the local park and playing family games (including Theraplay based games). This is to help increase the feeling of safety for the child. Over-stimulating activities and outings should be avoided; the child will already be in a higher state of arousal and anxiety due to the situation of moving to their new 'growing up' family, with all the emotional pressure that that will entail. Any further stimulation will be likely to cause distress or dysregulation as a child cannot take on lots of things all at once. This will take time. Lots of new experiences will overwhelm a child. They might well enjoy each individual experience on its own but if there are too many, then many children will experience sensory and emotional overload. This will then start to come out in their behaviour.

Meeting wider family and friends

It is advised that adopters leave a period of time before they introduce family and friends following placement of the child. Depending on the children and their circumstances this could be for a considerable period of time afterwards. This is to try and reduce the anxiety and fear that children may be experiencing having been moved several times already, including from a stable and caring foster placement. If strangers are introduced too soon into the family, the children may well experience fear and anxiety that they will be moved again. It also may trigger memories and anxieties of previous early childhood experiences, for example, living in a birth family with lots of strangers coming and going.

When introductions to new family members and/or friends take place, they need to be carefully planned around the needs of the child and kept brief, informal, in the new home, and with lots of preparation, explanation and reassurance by the adoptive parents before and after. Photos are useful to support explanations.

A gradual staged introduction to play-group/ childcare/ school

Children should not be rushed into play groups, childcare, nursery, school or clubs/activities, as they need prolonged time in the smaller family unit. If they are not given the time to begin to gain an understanding of their adoptive parents as their 'safe base', taking a child to a play-group can be very distressing for them. Furthermore, without a 'safe base' they are likely to approach strangers or sometimes believe that they are to be taken home by other parents there. Alternatively, a child may appear to be 'ok' with it all, but in reality, there will often be small signs of distress and anxiety present, that pre-empt very high levels of distress and associated behavioural disturbance.

Foster carers may talk about children being very sociable and needing to be introduced to external activities/school very quickly. However, an adoptive family

needs to be building a different kind of relationship with their child – a ‘forever’ one – not just a ‘looking after’ relationship.

An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to each other; their relationship will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family. Their relationship with each other needs to be given the time and the space to root itself and begin growing, without the distraction of other people, activities, nursery, toddler groups etc. Discussions about being enrolled or transferred between schools should be discussed and agreed at the transitions stage. These discussions many need to include the virtual head teacher.

3b) Ongoing contact with foster carers

Moving on is a time for a proper ending, not a forever goodbye, as abrupt endings are likely to lead to separation and loss issues for the child, therefore language that suggests the continuation of relationships is critical.

In most cases, the foster carers and their extended family will be significant and meaningful adults to the child and are likely to represent what sense of security the child has managed to internalise. Previous knowledge suggested a child needed months to settle into their new family before having any contact with their previous foster carers. However, given the current understanding, and insight into the potentially traumatising impact of effectively losing their main caregivers, and of being left with a sense that they have been rejected or abandoned by them, it is now recommended that the child has contact with his/her foster carers shortly after they are placed with their adoptive parents.

This shift in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers play in supporting a child in the transition to their new family, and advocates a need for the presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the transitions process.

Any ongoing contact plans will need to be based on a child's individual needs as well as that of the foster carers and adopters. These can be reviewed through the looked after child process prior to the adoption order.

Indirect contact using Skype, Facetime, telephone calls and letters/cards have been evidenced as a useful method for the child to maintain a relationship with their foster carers, and to support the settling in process, and ultimately strengthening the attachment of the child to their adoptive family. Ideally this should be in addition to the following plan:

First direct contact: within the first week of placement

This informal low-key visit by the foster carers to the child's new home is an opportunity for the child to understand that they have not been abandoned by their previous carers, and for the foster carers to demonstrate approval and support for the move. Such a visit would give the child an opportunity to show them their new home. After that, a neutral venue between the two homes would be appropriate.

We understand the child may be confused at this initial meeting, particularly about who is in charge, but an upset caused by this confusion is likely to be outweighed by the value to the child of the reassurance they will feel at seeing their foster carers. Any short-term disruption to the child will not undermine the good work done during the introductions period.

It is known that the child is likely to be unsettled for a few days after this initial meeting. However the child will settle again feeling safer and more trusting of their new parents. Furthermore, adopters themselves may feel unsure and insecure and will need support from their adoption social worker. Such a meeting will afford them the opportunity to understand better their child's emotional coping strategies.

Second direct contact: 2 weeks after first contact

With the underlying concept of promoting the adopters' bond to the child and the child's attachment to his new adoptive family firmly in the minds of those working for their benefit, the next meeting is to give the child further reassurance that their former carers have not forgotten them and still hold them in mind.

As stated previously, this meeting may again be followed by a period of unsettledness, but this would be a normal reaction to loss.

Third direct contact: 3 weeks after second contact

This meeting is an opportunity to acknowledge that it is OK to be settled and happy in their new home with permission from their foster carers.

Fourth direct contact: 4 weeks after third contact

By this time, if a relationship between the foster carers and the adopters is a natural one, it is hoped that they will be able to arrange any further meetings themselves.

Where the relationship is less natural, this would be the point where arrangements for some form of future contact could be made, be it regular Letterbox, or less regular face-to-face meetings.

Alternatively there could be an acknowledgement that the necessary work has been completed in moving the child successfully and that the adults will no longer stay in contact, secure in the knowledge that they have given the child the best opportunity to settle into their new home.

Share Appendix 7: Scripts and guidance for contact with foster carers and adopters.



References:

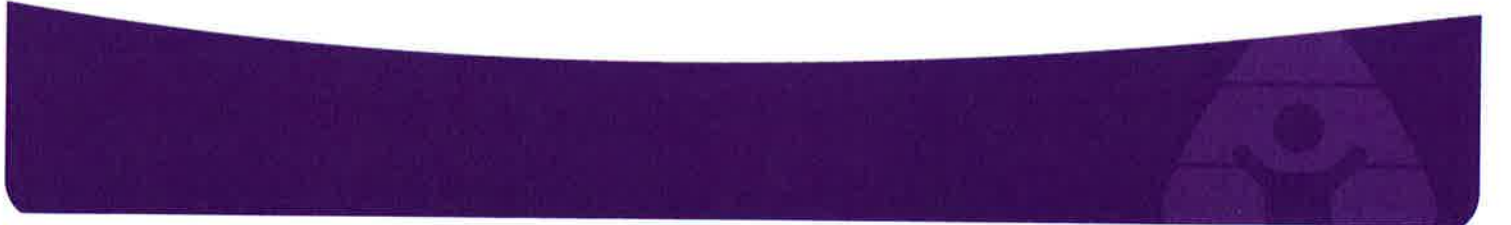
Boswell, S & Cudmore, L (2014), 'The children were fine': acknowledging complex feelings in the move from foster care to adoption, *Adoption & Fostering*, Vol 38(1), p5-21, Sage

CoramBAAF Practice note 64: Best practice in meetings between prospective adopters and children prior to matching

Hughes, D (2006) *Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children* New York: Aronson

Jernberg, A (1979) *Theraplay: A New Treatment Using Structured Play for Problem Children and Their Families*

Selwyn, J, Wijedasa, D, Meakings, S (2014), *Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*, Department for Education, University of Bris





Appendix 1: Pre-Placement Meeting Template

Agenda and minutes of initial meeting between foster carer/s and adoptive parent/s

Date:

Attendees:

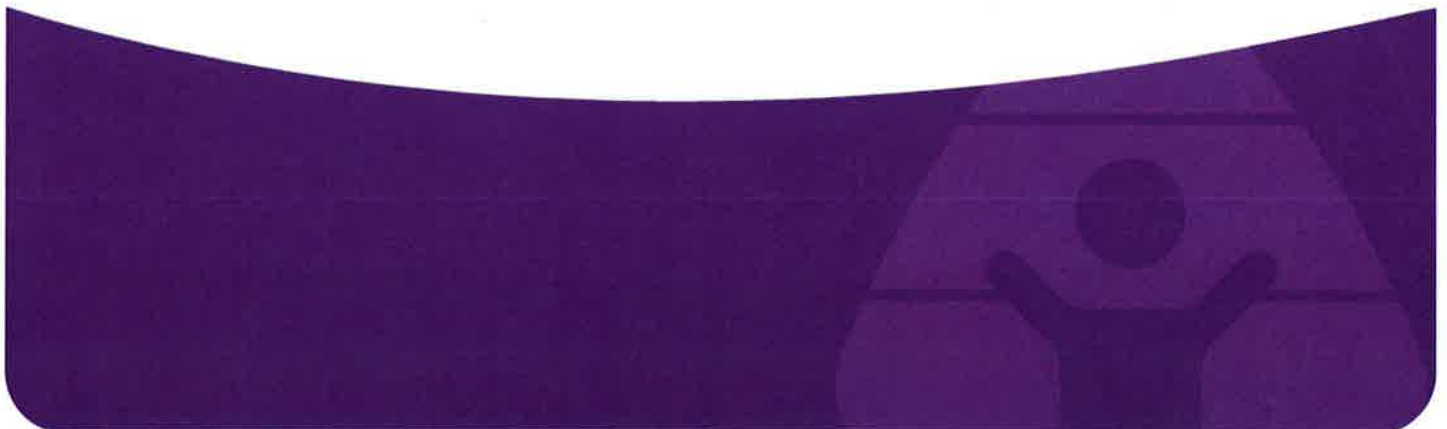
(Family Finder, adopter(s), adopter(s) social worker, foster carer(s) and supervising social worker, child's social worker)

Aim: To develop a shared understanding of what living and caring for the child is like on a daily basis.

At this meeting, the potential mismatch between all concerned in how the introductions process is viewed and the differing emotions should be acknowledged and explored.

Areas to consider in detail:

- What the child was like (e.g. behaviour, routines, emotional state, self-care etc.) when they arrived in foster care?
- How they have changed and why?
- Knowledge about current routines (updating on the carers report).
- Child's likes and dislikes and how these are managed.
- How is this particular child likely to view the move?
- What has been the foster carers' experience of how the child has reacted to change?
- Information about the child's attachment style and needs; for example, how they relate to people and how they deal with heightened emotions.
- How the foster carer(s) support and manage the child's emotions, behaviour etc. How do they behave when they are anxious or worried? What are their behaviours on these occasions?
- How do they express other emotions such as anger and sadness? Do they hold them in or do they overtly demonstrate how they are feeling?



Appendix 2: Transitions information for foster carers

Imagine moving away from all of our life, including our family, job, friends, pets and possessions all in one go, as an adult, and how frightening and distressing that would be. Now if we were to imagine a small child, one who has likely experienced much trauma, having to undergo such a move, again (having already been removed from their birth family); we may then have some sense of the potential trauma a move to an adoptive family is likely to be...

With that in mind, moving from foster care to an adoptive family may be a traumatic experience for a child who may show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers.

Additionally, children may have a range of emotions from their past evoked by the words 'mummy' and 'daddy', and such feelings will be registering in a child's brain at different levels.

The child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions.

However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Furthermore, concepts of 'permanence' and the 'future' are beyond the comprehension of children under the age of five, who have no real understanding of time. However, we know how child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move.

Things to think about before introductions start:

Does the child you are looking after have some understanding of:

- Why they cannot live with their birth family?
- Why they are living with you?
- What your role is?
- Why they need an adoptive/long term family?

- When this is going to happen?
- Are they going to see important people like their foster carers after they have moved?

If you are worried about any of the above – speak to your supervising social worker and/or the child’s social worker. There are lots of books and resources available that can help prepare the child for understanding foster care and looking for a new family.

Preparing the child for introductions:

Think about the timing of the ‘welcome to our family’ book and all other items that the adopters may provide such as photos to put up on the children’s walls, cuddly toys with the adopters’ home smells on (transitions objects) and DVDs. This timing will need to be worked out with your supervising social worker, the child’s social worker and the family finder (where relevant).

Start of introductions:

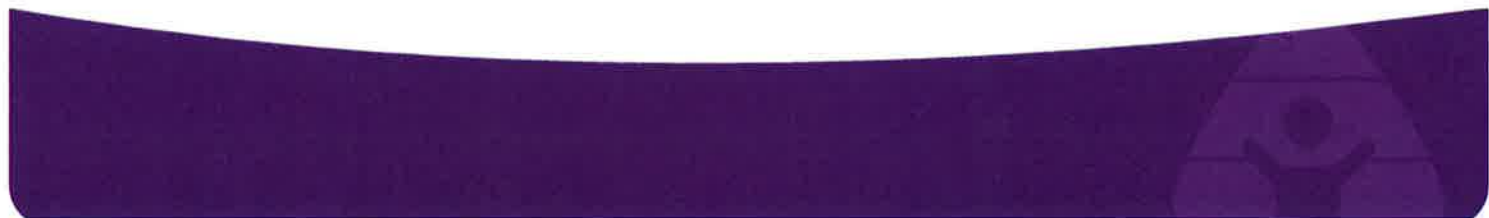
Think about what everyone will do when the adopters and child first meet – have a plan to help remove some of the anxiety as everyone will be very anxious. The meeting only lasts around an hour so as not to overwhelm the child.

During introductions:

Introductions have several aims. The first is for the child to meet their family, to begin to feel safe and secure with their family and know that their new family is learning all about them, what they need, their likes and dislikes etc. and that their new family accepts them for who they are. They also need to feel that the foster carers are giving permission for them to move on. Finally, the adopters also need to begin to build their confidence in relation to caring for the child.

The introductions plans start very gradually, with an hour meeting between the child and adopters. The time spent between adopters and children is gradually extended day by day. The adopters at first observe you caring for the child and then over time, you will need to involve them in the caring activities. By the end of the introductions period, there is a shift in care and the adopters are now responsible for caring for the child.

The adopters need to be included in all family activities where specified, including eating together as a family around the child. The adopters need to be actively involved and not just present as observers, apart from at first.



All activities should be calm, low-key and interactive, such as going to the local park, playing games in the house, Theraplay based games, reading books, jigsaw puzzles, art and crafts, going for walks and playing I-Spy or collecting leaves. Do not choose activities that may over-stimulate and over-excite the child and detract from the one-to-one interaction and relationship building. Alternatively, the child might well appear to enjoy the day but it does not help the adopters learn about the 'looking after' routines which make the child feel safe.

Do not assume the child is excited or happy about having a new mummy or daddy. They will most likely have a whole range of muddled feelings. It is easy for them to get swept up in the adults' excitement and not feel their own feelings. They need a chance to explore these with you and if necessary, have a meltdown! They need the space and time to work through these very complicated feelings.

Some children will pretend they are OK to please the adults around them. This is the strategy they may have adopted with their birth family to get through life and keep themselves safe. They are not OK – they are about to move away from everything and everyone they know and gain a new family including perhaps siblings, new home, new bedroom, new pets, new school/pre-school, and new friends!

Experience shows us that introductions should not be shortened or rushed. This applies to the overall plan and also the daily plan. The daily times are specified in order to build up slowly the time the child spends with the adopters, in order to begin to help them feel safe with them and not overwhelm or frighten them. The slower pace also helps children process these enormous changes to their lives, and helps them to feel their feelings.

Please take a couple of photos of everyone together, including yourselves, adopters and child, playing a game all together or all at the park, to show the child that you have given permission to adopters for the child to move on and that you trust the adopters. These photos have proved very important to children, as they begin to piece together their various moves and what they meant.

If you can, please start to use Skype/Facetime etc. before introductions start to get the child used to it as a means of communication. Then this can be used during introductions to help the child understand that the adopters are still there after they have left the house and that they are thinking of them, during the first half of introductions. Then it can be used during second half of introductions and afterwards, between the foster carers and adopters and child, to show that the foster carers are

thinking of the child and keeping them in mind. This gives the child an opportunity to express their emotions and grieve and for the adopters to comfort them.

On the final move day, the adopters will collect the child from the foster carers' home at the agreed time. The child's social worker should be present to ensure that all paperwork is handed over. The hand over should be kept short and it is OK for emotions to be expressed for the child to know they are loved and will be missed but ultimately have permission to move on.

If the adopter's home is further away, there is an expectation that the foster carer/family would travel and stay local to the adopter's home during the second half of the introductions to support the child's transition to their new home.

Post-placement contact between yourselves and the adopters and child should be included in the introductions plan so that you can say to the child I will send a card to you very soon or I will speak to you very soon, as you say goodbye. This section needs to be discussed and planned with the family finder, supervising social worker and child's social worker as what will be appropriate to say and how to manage any direct contact. Your supervising social worker will support you with this. The main aim for any such contact is for you to pass on the message that you have the child in mind and think about them, you miss them and care for them and they have not been forgotten.

Please do not organise a holiday just after introductions have finished, as there are times when introductions need to be extended and slowed down as the child is not coping or ready to move.

Remember that an adoptive family needs to build a different kind of relationship with their child – a 'growing up' one – not a 'looking after' relationship. There is a difference between the routine that they will need to carry on from you for a period, which creates the family atmosphere and provides routine and safety for the child, and there are the social patterns which they will need to change straight away, for a certain period, such as not inviting friends and family around, not sending the child to nursery or school straightaway. An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to them first and foremost; their relationship with their adopters will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family.



It is likely you and other members of your family will be feeling anxiety, grief and loss over the departure of your foster child; please talk to your fostering social worker who can support you at this time.

Potential difficulties which may arise:

The child expressed that they want to move immediately – however, the adults around the child need to help manage their anxiety and talk to them about this, support them emotionally and make use of tools such as calendars etc.

The child behaves as if the 'perfect child'; there can sometimes also be the temptation to speed up the transitions as they seem to be doing fine. However, there are many examples where the child has gone into meltdown shortly afterwards, as they were not OK and did not feel safe enough with adopters yet. Similarly the adopters did not have enough confidence in managing the child.

If you have any difficulties with the adopters – please speak to your supervising social worker, who can support you with this.

Helpful language for use with children during and after transitions

- I wonder if/maybe you are feeling really wobbly/fizzy/muddy...
- Sometimes when we wake in the night, it can be for all sorts of reasons. We might be missing someone... Maybe you are missing... (name of foster carer, friend, cat etc.). Shall we write them a postcard/make them a card... Sometimes it is hard to go to sleep when you have lots of thoughts in your head...
- You look like you are feeling sad/angry etc. It is a very, very big thing to move to a new house, school, family... especially when you really liked living with... and felt safe there.
- Let's look at the 'looking after family' book/photos etc.
- Maybe you are angry with mummy/daddy for taking you away from your house, school, family etc...



- It must be really hard for you because mummy/daddy said you can't have the sweets. But I wonder if maybe you are angry too because you think I have taken you away from....
- If a child has fallen over and is being rejecting – 'maybe you feel very sad because you want a hug from And not from me. That is really hard – perhaps I could try and help you with that...'
- You seem to be really struggling to do what mummy/daddy is asking – how can I help you with that?
- 'I wonder if... / I am curious about ...'
- It sounds like... / It feels like...
- It is ok to feel like that; if I were you I might too.
- I notice there are some tricky/big feelings.
- Wow, that must be really hard for you...
- This must be really scary for you...
- I notice you look really sad about that...
- I can really hear that you are sad today... etc.
- Things seem really difficult for you today...
- I can see you have lots of strong feelings today...
- Why don't/How about I help you with that...?
- That is a puzzle – we are going to have to think about what to do about that...
- Talk aloud to each other; between adults or to the cat etc. 'I wonder what is happening to right now...'



Finally, avoid the following questions: Why? What is the matter? Children struggle with such questions as they do not have often have the ability to recognise what their emotion is, to put it into language, or cannot begin to make the links between a certain emotion and their past/things that have happened to them.



Appendix 3: Transitions information for prospective adopters

Imagine moving away from all of our life, including our family, job, friends, pets and possessions all in one go, as an adult, and how frightening and distressing that would be. Now if we were to imagine a small child, one who has likely experienced much trauma, having to undergo such a move, again (having already been removed from their birth family); we may then have some sense of the potential trauma a move to an adoptive family is likely to be...

With that in mind, moving from foster care to an adoptive family may be a traumatic experience for a child who may show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers.

Additionally, children may have a range of emotions from their past evoked by the words 'mummy' and 'daddy', and such feelings will be registering in a child's brain at different levels.

The child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions.

However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Furthermore, concepts of 'permanence' and the 'future' are beyond the comprehension of children under the age of five, who have no real understanding of time. However, we know how child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move.

Things to think about before introductions start:

The child you are adopting should be starting to have a basic understanding of:

- Why they lived with their 'looking after' family (their foster carers) and what their role was, terms of keeping them safe?



- Why they cannot live with their birth family?
- Why they need an adoptive/permanent family?
- When this is going to happen? How this is going to happen?
- Are they going to see important people like their foster carers after they have moved?

If you have any questions about the above please speak to your assessing social worker and/or the child's social worker.

There are lots of books and resources available that can help prepare the child for understanding foster care and looking for a new family. However, it is normal for a child who is being adopted to have only a basic understanding of the above due to their age and developmental stage. One of your crucial tasks as an adopter will be to support them in developing and building on this basic understanding as your child grows up. The adoption team can support you with these tasks.

Preparing the child for introductions:

Theraplay based games where possible will be used in introductions. For more information please speak to your assessing social worker who can provide a booklet on the games.

You will have been asked to do a 'welcome to our family' book before matching panel and perhaps provide other items such as photos to put up on the children's walls, cuddly toys with your home smells on (to act as transitional objects) and perhaps a DVD/CD of you reading a story book or singing a particular nursery rhyme. The child's social worker and your assessing social worker will advise on what else to provide in addition to the book, depending on the age and needs of the child.

Key points for the 'Welcome to our family' book:

- Keep it very simple, short and straightforward
- Only introduce the immediate family unit – no extended family (unless you are a single carer and then only introduce the key supporters)
- Use photos – of you, the house, the garden, their room, any pets etc.
- You can include photos of you doing routine things like eating a meal, or playing a game etc.
- Keep the key message short and not too emotional – something like you are looking forward to meeting them and learning all about them, and are excited about the child coming to live with you.

- Discuss with your social worker using the terms 'mummy'/'daddy'. Sometimes we may include first names so that it is up to the child to decide when they want to start using the terms.
- If you are going to provide a transitional object like a teddy bear, it can be useful to include the teddy bear in some of the photos. This can make the book more interactive, for when you meet your child.
- Do not worry about not being arty/creative etc. It is often the most basic books that work best as they do not overwhelm the child or put any emotional pressure on them.

Start of introductions:

You will most likely be very anxious and emotional about meeting your child for the first time. You do not need to prepare any games/activities. It is about them seeing you and then perhaps looking through the 'welcome to my family book' together. The meeting only lasts around an hour so as not to overwhelm the child. Often the foster carers and particularly the child themselves are highly anxious. The child may talk non-stop or be very quiet.

During introductions:

Introductions have several aims. The first is for the child to meet you as their new family, to begin to feel safe, secure and to trust you and know that their new family is learning all about them, what they need, their likes and dislikes etc. They also need to start understanding that you as their new family accepts them for who they are. They also need to feel that the foster carers are giving permission for them to move on. Finally, it is also time for you to begin to build your confidence in relation to caring for the child.

The introductions plan starts very gradually, with an initial hour meeting between the child and yourselves. The time spent between you and your child is gradually extended day by day. At first you observe the foster carers caring for the child and then over time, you will be involved in the caring activities. By the end of the introductions period, there is a shift in care and you are now responsible for caring for the child.

You will be included in all family activities where specified, including eating together as a family around the child. You will be actively involved and not just present as observers, apart from at first.

It is not suitable for the plan to include sessions where the child is left alone with you, during the first couple of days or even the first week.

All activities should be calm, low-key and interactive, such as going to the local park, playing games in the house, Theraplay based games, reading books, jigsaw puzzles, art and crafts, going for walks and playing I-Spy or collecting leaves. Avoid activities that may over-stimulate and over-excite the child and detract from the one-to-one interaction and relationship building. The child might well appear to enjoy the day but it does not help you learn about the 'looking after' routines which you will need to do day in day out and that make the child feel safe.

Do not assume the child is excited or happy about having a new mummy or daddy. They will most likely have a whole range of muddled feelings. It is easy for them to get swept up in the adults' excitement and not feel their own feelings. They need a chance to explore these with you and their foster carers and if necessary, have a meltdown! They need the space and time to work through these very complicated feelings.

Some children will pretend they are OK to please the adults around them. This is the strategy they may have adopted with their birth family to get through life and keep themselves safe. They are not OK – they are about to move away from everything and everyone they know and gain a new family including perhaps siblings, new home, new bedroom, new pets, new school/pre-school, and new friends. So do look out for the smaller signs of anxiety, such as chewing collars, or picking at skin etc. Ask their foster carer to tell you about such signs and how your child may have displayed or dealt with anxiety whilst living with them. Learn from the foster carer how to sooth your child.

Experience shows us that introductions should not be shortened or rushed. This applies to the overall plan and also the daily plan. The daily times are specified in order to build up slowly the time the child spends with the adopters, in order to begin to help them feel safe with them and not overwhelm or frighten them. The slower pace also helps children process these enormous changes to their lives, and helps them to feel their feelings. Do not reduce or modify the plan with the foster carers, apart from to take into account practicalities – stick to the plan as much as possible. If you do wish to change the plan, please talk to your assessing social worker.

Please take a couple of photos of everyone together, including yourselves, the foster carers and child, playing a game all together or all at the park. This is very important,

as it will show the child that their foster carers have given permission for the child to move on and that they trust you as the child's new family. These photos have also proved very important to children, as they begin to piece together their various moves and what they meant.

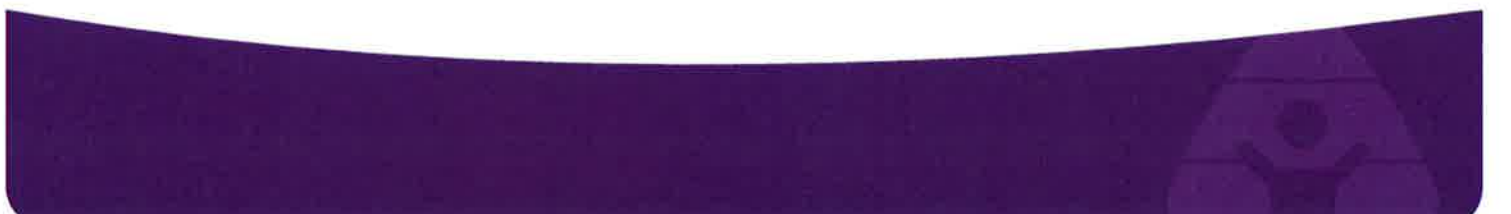
Skype/Facetime etc. can be used during introductions to help the child understand that you are still there after you have left the house and that you are thinking of them, during the first half of introductions. Then it can be used during the second half of introductions and afterwards, between the foster carers and you and child, to show that the foster carers are thinking of the child and keeping them in mind. This gives the child an opportunity to express their emotions and grieve and you to comfort them.

On the final move day, the adopters will collect the child from the foster carers' home at the agreed time. The child's social worker should be present to ensure that all paperwork is handed over. The hand over should be kept short and it is OK for emotions to be expressed for the child to know they are loved and will be missed but ultimately have permission to move on.

Post placement contact between yourselves and the foster carers and child should have been included in the introductions plan so that you can say to the child your foster carer will send a card to you very soon or they will speak to you very soon, when the foster carer has said goodbye. This section needs to be discussed and planned with the family finder, your assessing social worker and child's social worker as what will be appropriate to say and how to manage any direct contact. The supervising social worker for the foster carers will support them with this. The main aim for any such contact is for the foster carers to pass on the message that they have the child in mind and think about them, they miss them and care for them and they have not been forgotten. These messages are key in helping a child begin to understand that relationships can last, which then helps them begin to understand that your relationship with each other can last. This is vital as most children who are adopted do not understand what permanence means. This contact actively and physically demonstrates long lasting relationships to the child which will help children to begin believing in and understanding the words used to describe permanence.

Potential difficulties which may arise:

The child expressed that they want to move immediately – however, the adults around the child need to help manage their anxiety and talk to them about this, support them emotionally and make use of tools such as calendars etc.



The child behaves as if the 'perfect child'; there can sometimes also be the temptation to speed up the transitions as they seem to be doing fine. However, we have many examples where the child has gone into meltdown shortly afterwards, as they were not OK and did not feel safe enough with their new family yet. Similarly their new family did not have enough confidence in helping the child to manage these emotions.

During the introductions, there will be a day of reflection for yourselves just before the mid-way review. Please use this for reflection and not to do odd jobs etc. Please discuss these feelings with your assessing social worker. If you are experiencing a high level of such feelings, please really consider whether this is the match for you. If you have any feelings at all of uncertainty, misgivings and doubt, or gut feeling during introductions, it is better to slow down or stop the process, even though this may be deeply upsetting for all concerned, rather than continue at the same pace or at all, which may lead to a disruption in the future, a situation which is much harder to untangle and will have a much more long-lasting impact on the child and you.

If you have any issues, question or worries– please speak to your assessing social worker, who can support you with these.

After placement

After introductions, comes the nesting period where you spend quality and exclusive time with your child, in order to begin to build bonds. The key concepts are:

- **A focus on the smaller family unit**

The focus needs to be kept on the smaller family unit for a sustained period of time, emphasis needs to be on family activities, games and routines. The role of the family and parents needs to be highlighted to the child on an ongoing basis and in a low-key gentle manner, linking the role back to the 'keeping safe' message from the life story books.

- **Low-key, calm routines**

The low-key, calming routines and activities from the transitions period should be continued; such as going to the local park and playing family games (including Theraplay based games) etc. This is to help increase the feeling of safety for the child. When you go out, talk through each step and then the return home at the end

of the day. Clarity about what is happening next and repetition about the journey home and returning home will help your child, over time, to begin to build a sense of safety and also to develop an understanding that they are here to stay with you.

Over-stimulating activities and outings should be avoided; the child will already be in a higher state of arousal and anxiety due to the situation of moving to their new 'growing up' family, with all the emotional pressure that that will entail. Any further stimulation is likely to cause distress or dysregulation, as a child cannot take on lots of things all at once. This will take time.

Remember a child cannot take on lots of new things all at once! This will take time. The child might well enjoy each individual experience on its own but if there are too many, then many children will experience sensory and emotional overload, and feel overwhelmed. This will then start to come out in their behaviour.

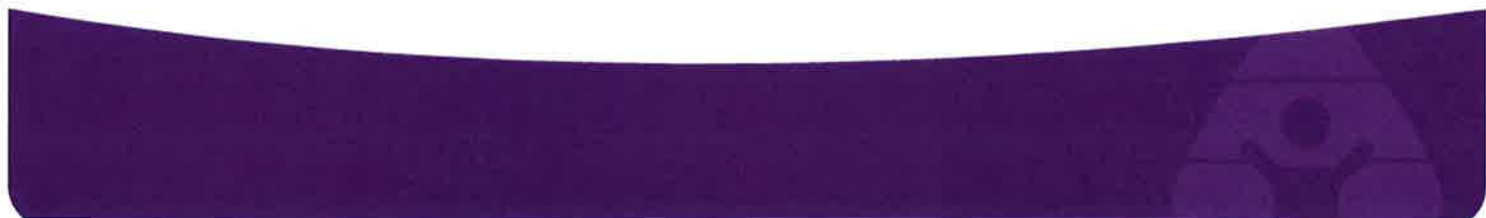
Being mindful of the child's inner world and feelings will go a long way to help them to develop security and trust with you, as their new family.

Holidays are to be avoided for at least six months, ideally twelve months, for similar reasons.

Any special events, such as birthdays and Christmas, if they come up relatively quickly after placement, need to be kept calm, quiet and low key for the same reasons, with a minimum number of presents. Children may find such events too much for a number of reasons, such as bringing back memories of birth family etc. or they cannot cope with the anxiety of a change to their routine and the heightened emotions of such events, as well as the focus on family. It is completely understandable to wish to spoil your children and give them the material things and new experiences they perhaps did not have in their birth family, but it is your time, attention, love and understanding that will make all the difference to them in the long term.

- **Meeting the adopters' wider family and friends**

We recommend that adopters leave a period of time before they introduce family and friends following placement of the child. Depending on the children and their specific needs this could be for a considerable period of time afterwards.



This is to try and reduce the anxiety and fear that children may be experiencing having been moved several times already, including from a stable and caring foster placement.

If strangers are introduced too soon into the family, the children may well experience fear and anxiety that they will be moved again. It also may trigger memories and anxieties of previous early childhood experiences, for example, living in a birth family with lots of strangers coming and going.

When introductions to new family members and/or friends take place, they must be carefully planned around the needs of the child and kept brief and informal, in the new home, and with lots of preparation, explanation and reassurance by the adoptive parents before and after.

Photos are useful to support explanations.

However, it is also recognised that single adopters may well need support sooner. In these circumstances, we advise that you only introduce initial and limited back-up carers, such as grandparents, and also, at first, limit the time of any such introduction, ensuring their focus is on the child's needs.

- **A gradual staged introduction to play-group / childcare / school**

Children should not be rushed into the above, as they need prolonged time in the smaller family unit. If they are not given the time to begin to gain an understanding of their adoptive parents as their 'safe base', taking a child to a play-group can be very distressing for them.

Furthermore, without a 'safe base' they are likely to approach strangers or sometimes believe that they are to be taken home by other parents there.

Alternatively, a child may appear to be 'OK' with it all, but in reality, there will often be small signs of distress and anxiety present, that pre-empt very high levels of distress and associated behavioural disturbance.

Foster carers may talk about children being very sociable and needing to be introduced to external activities/school etc. very quickly. The foster carers for your child may well recommend that you continue to take the child to a toddler group, as they are so sociable etc. However, an adoptive family need to build a different kind of relationship with their child – a 'Growing up' one – not a 'Looking after' relationship.

There is a difference between the routine that you will need to carry on from the foster carers for a period, which creates the family atmosphere and provides routine and safety for your child, and there are the social patterns which you do need to change straight away, for the nesting period.

An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to you first and foremost; their relationship with you will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family.

Their relationship with you needs to be given the time and the space to root itself and begin growing, without the distraction of other people, activities, nursery, toddler groups etc. You need to become the centre of their world, 'special' to them, before their world can expand safely and successfully. If you have any queries about your child starting nursery, school etc. or meeting family and when to go on holiday and the timings, please contact your assessing social worker.

The future:

There will most likely be a honeymoon period at first, when your child seems 'fine' and seems to be coping with it all.

You will need to tap into your child's emotions - they will most likely be feeling hurt, helpless, inadequate, sad, angry... and this is also a reflection on how you might be feeling too, faced with such a complicated and difficult parenting task! After such a long and complex journey to get here – yet they may not feel like your own child yet, it may feel like you are looking after someone else's child for a while. This is completely normal – it takes time to build a bond. Your child will be feeling this too.

Take their emotions seriously; they may be feeling pain, fear, grief etc. which causes them distress and then they may act out. This does not mean giving in or tolerating bad behaviour. However, it does mean acknowledging and starting to address the emotional roots of any such behaviour.

It is not always about knowing or finding out the answers for your child or about getting it right. The most important thing you can do for your child is to be there and accept their emotions. Sit with them and give them a hug, if you can!

Don't take your child's behaviour personally – it will most likely stem from their early years and what happened to them. It is OK to feel hurt and rejected by their

behaviour... and you don't have to pretend that everything is OK. Your emotional response to your child and their behaviour is valid! Recognise and own it.

Adoptive families have told us that there will be difficult times for all adoptive families and you will need to expect this. There are no quick, easy solutions and what will work for children with a secure attachment will not work for your child. They will need parenting differently and you may have to explain to family and friends why you need to parent differently. Ask them for their help in this!

It can be helpful to talk to other adopters. Talk to your assessing social worker about the coffee mornings, mentoring and support groups that Adoption Central England organises.

Helpful language for use with children during and after transitions

- I wonder if/maybe you are feeling really wobbly/fizzy/muddy...
- Sometimes when we wake in the night, it can be for all sorts of reasons. We might be missing someone... Maybe you are missing... (name of foster carer, friend, cat etc.). Shall we write them a postcard/make them a card... Sometimes it is hard to go to sleep when you have lots of thoughts in your head...
- You look like you are feeling sad/angry etc. It is a very, very big thing to move to a new house, school, family... especially when you really liked living with... and felt safe there.
- Let's look at the 'looking after family' book/photos etc.
- Maybe you are angry with mummy/daddy for taking you away from your house, school, family etc...
- It must be really hard for you because mummy/daddy said you can't have the sweets. But I wonder if maybe you are angry too because you think I have taken you away from....
- If a child has fallen over and is being rejecting – 'maybe you feel very sad because you want a hug from and not from me. That is really hard – perhaps I could try and help you with that...'

- You seem to be really struggling to do what mummy/daddy is asking – how can I help you with that?
- 'I wonder if... / I am curious about ...'
- It sounds like... / It feels like...
- It is OK to feel like that; if I were you I might too.
- I notice there are some tricky/big feelings..
- Wow, that must be really hard for you...
- This must be really scary for you...
- I notice you look really sad about that...
- I can really hear that you are sad today... etc.
- Things seem really difficult for you today...
- I can see you have lots of strong feelings today...
- Why don't/How about I help you with that...?
- That is a puzzle – we are going to have to think about what to do about that...
- Talk aloud to each other; between adults or to the cat etc. 'I wonder what is happening to right now...'
- Finally, avoid the following questions: Why? What is the matter? Children struggle with such questions as they do not have often have the ability to recognise what their emotion is, to put it into language, or cannot begin to make the links between a certain emotion and their past/things that have happened to them.





Adoption Central England

Appendix 4: Life Appreciation Days

Link to Ace leaflet on Life Appreciation Days





Adoption Central England

Appendix 5: Transition Plan template





Adoption Central England

Name

Age

Transitions Plan

Photo

_____ belongs to slowly be transferred to _____ home through the course of introductions so that on the day of her move she are only left with a few last essential items to go with her on moving day.



**Adoption
Central
England**

Introductions Timetable – agreed at Placement Planning Meeting on _____

Panel recommendation _____ ADM approving Match _____

Please note, any significant changes of more than 60 minutes to these arrangements need to be discussed with _____ thank you.

Monday 1 st April 2019	Tuesday 2 nd April 2019	Weds 3 rd April 2019	Thurs 4 th April 2019	Friday 5 th April 2019	Saturday 6 th April 2019	Sunday 7 th April 2019

Monday 8 th April 2019	Tuesday 9 th April 2019	Wednesday 10 th April 2019	Thursday 11 th April 2019	Friday 12 th April 2019	Saturday 13 th April 2019	Sunday 14 th April 2019

Monday 15 th April 2019 DAY 1	Tuesday 16 th April 2019 DAY 2	Weds 17 th April 2019 DAY 3	Thurs 18 th April 2019 DAY 4	Friday 19 th April 2019 DAY 5	Saturday 20 th April 2019 DAY 6	Sunday 21 st April 2019 DAY 7

Monday 22 nd April 2019 DAY 8	Tuesday 23 rd April 2019 DAY 9	Weds 24 th April 2019 DAY 10	Thurs 25 th April 2019 DAY 11	Friday 26 th April 2019 DAY 12	Saturday 27 th April 2019 DAY 13	Sunday 28 th April 2019 DAY 14

Monday 29 th April	Tuesday 30 th April	Wednesday 1 st May	Thursday 2 nd May	Friday 3 rd May	Saturday 4 th May	Sunday 5 th May

After placement move

- _____ to be visited by social workers following placement weekly up to the 1st Adoption Review meeting on the following dates:-

Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four
----------	----------	------------	-----------

- _____ to have a face to face visit with FC on the following dates:

1 st contact: within first week	2 nd contact: Two weeks after 1 st contact	3 rd contact: Three weeks after 2 nd contact	4 th contact: Four weeks after 3 rd contact
--	--	--	---

- CHILD to be seen by the new health visitor within a few days after placement move.
- 1st Adoption Review Meeting DATE TO BE CONFIRMED to be held at ADOPTERS home – Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is _____. At this meeting the continued frequency of social work visits to be agreed.
- There will be continued regular social work visits to the child in her adoptive placement until such time that there is an Adoption Order granted (which can be applied for after 10 weeks of the placement).
- Adoption SW will remain allocated to support ADOPTERS for a year following the Adoption Order being granted.

Contact Details

Emergency Duty Team for the child (out of hours service)	01905 768020
ACE (Adoption Central England)	0300 369 0556 (Main ACE number during office hours)
_____ (Foster Carers)	Address: Tel: Email:
_____ (prospective adopters)	Address: Tel: Email:
_____ (child's social worker)	Address: Office Tel: Email: <u>k</u>
_____ (adoption Social Worker)	Address : ACE Main Office, Saltisford Office Park, Ansell Way, Warwick, CV34 4UL Tel No: 0300 369 0556 Email :
_____ (fostering social worker)	Address: Tel: Email:
_____ (Adoption Team manager)	Address : ACE Main Office, Saltisford Office Park, Ansell Way, Warwick, CV34 4UL Tel No : 03003690556 Email :



Adoption Central England

Appendix 6: Midway review template



Review of Introductions for:

It is important that all attendees of the meeting are open and honest in expressing their views regarding the introductions and plans for placement.

Agency process for Review of Introductions

The purpose of the Review of Introductions Meeting is:

- To discuss the first half of the Introductions Timetable, and to ensure that the Timetable is being followed as was agreed in the Placement Planning Meeting
- To discuss the second half of the Introductions Timetable and make any amendments as required
- To discuss the views of foster carers, adopters, and all professionals regarding the progress of the Introductions
- To discuss how the child/ren are managing the transition during Introductions, and the extent to which attachments are beginning to form with the adopters
- Any additional support which has been identified during the Introductions, that has not previously been discussed

For all to agree that either:

- a) That all actions for the Placement Planning Meeting have been completed and it is appropriate to continue with the second half of Introductions and for the child/ren to move on the agreed date.
OR
- b) There needs to be an extension to the Introductions Timetable and for this to be reviewed at a later date, and a move date set OR
- c) That it is not considered possible for the child/ren to move to the adopters.

Review of Timetable:

Views of adopter/s:

Views of foster carer/s:

Views of Child/ren's social worker

Views of adopter/s social worker:

Views of foster carer/s social worker:

Any additional support identified:

Decision

All in agreement:

- a) That all actions for the Placement Planning Meeting have been completed and it is appropriate to continue with the second half of Introductions and for the child/ren to move on the agreed date.
- b) There needs to be an extension to the Introductions Timetable and for this to be reviewed at a later date, and a move date set.
- c) That it is not considered possible for the child/ren to move to the adopters.



Actions to check:

- [] ACE Adopters Placement Consent signed and dated**
- [] LA notifications sent**
- [] Placement order to be provided**
- [] Birth certificate to be provided**
- [] Authorisation for medical consent**

Signed:



Appendix 7: Ongoing contact between foster carers and adopters

Moving on is a time for a proper ending, not a forever goodbye, as abrupt endings are likely to lead to separation and loss issues for the child, therefore language that suggests the continuation of relationships is critical.

In most cases, the foster carers and their extended family will be significant and meaningful adults to the child and are likely to represent what sense of security the child has managed to internalize. Previous knowledge suggested a child needed months to 'settle' into their new family before having any contact with their previous foster carers. However, given the current understanding, and insight into the potentially traumatising impact of effectively 'losing' their main caregivers, and of being left with a sense that they have been rejected or abandoned by them, it is now recommended that the child has contact with his/her foster carers shortly after they are placed with their adoptive parents.

This shift in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers play in supporting a child in the transition to their new family, and advocates a need for the presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the transitions process.

Indirect contact using Skype, Facetime, telephone calls and letters/cards have been evidenced as a useful method for the child to maintain a relationship with their foster carers, and to support the settling in process, and ultimately strengthening the attachment of the child to their adoptive family. Ideally this should be in addition to the following plan:

1st direct contact: within the first week of placing

This informal low-key visit by the foster carers to the child's new home is an opportunity for the child to understand that they have not been abandoned by their previous carers, and for the foster carers to demonstrate approval and support for the move. Such a visit would give the child an opportunity to show them their new home. After that, a neutral venue between the two homes would be appropriate. This meeting would be an hour at most.

We understand the child may be confused at this initial meeting, particularly about who is 'in charge', but an upset caused by this confusion is likely to be outweighed by the value to the child of the reassurance they will feel at seeing their foster carers. Any short-term disruption to the child will not undermine the good work done during the introductions period.

We know that the child is likely to be unsettled for a few days after this initial meeting. However, we also know that the child will settle again, safer and more trusting of their new parents. Furthermore, while we know that adopters themselves may feel unsure and insecure and will need support from their adoption social worker, such a meeting affords them an opportunity to glimpse in the here and now something of their child's emotional coping strategies.

At the first contact, foster carers must avoid asking the child to come to them (for example at the front door), and attempting to hug them in order to accommodate their (the foster carers) emotional needs rather than those of the child.

If a child runs to them, and gives them a hug then reciprocal actions are appropriate. It is vital to ensure that the emotional needs of the child are contained at all times.

During the first contact it is likely that the adoptive parents will be nervous and emotional; whilst they will have agreed to this contact, in their minds it is likely that they will be thinking about the possibility that the presence of the foster carers will unsettle the child, rather than settle them. They will also be worried that the child will ignore them and only want to spend time with their former foster carers. All actions must be taken within the context that the aim of the contact is to support the developing relationship between the child and their adoptive parents.

It is important to bear in mind that the child is likely to respond to the indirect or direct presence of their foster carers with activated behaviour. As the aim of the contacts is to help the child to settle, it is important that foster carers maintain a position of deferring, gently and compassionately, to the adoptive parents during this contact.

During contact time with the child, it is important to ensure that there are affirmations of their new life (home, bedroom, diet, clothing, routines), and both the child and their adoptive parents get the message that the foster carers approve, and therefore give permission for the child to move on. Emotions are OK during contact, however, it is vital that they are limited to expressions that the child can manage. Whilst a few tears indicate permission and acceptance of emotions, sobbing is likely to confuse and unsettle a child.

2nd direct contact: 2 weeks after 1st contact

With the underlying concept of promoting the adopters' bond to the child and the child's attachment to his new adoptive family firmly in the minds of those working for their benefit, the next meeting is to give the child further reassurance that their former carers have not forgotten them and still hold them in mind.

As stated previously, this meeting may again be followed by a period of unsettledness, but again this would be a normal reaction to loss.

3rd direct contact: 3 weeks after 2nd contact

This meeting is an opportunity to acknowledge that it is OK to be settled and happy in their new home with the permission of their foster carers.

4th direct contact: 4 weeks after 3rd contact

By this time, if a relationship between the foster carers and the adopters is a natural one, it is hoped that they will be able to arrange any further meetings themselves.

If the relationship were less natural, this would be the point where arrangements for some form of future contact could be made, be it regular Letterbox, or less regular face-to-face meetings.

Alternatively there could be an acknowledgement that the necessary work has been done and that the adults will no longer stay in contact but secure in the knowledge that they have given the child the best opportunity to settle into their new home.

Foster carer suggested phrases could include:

'I wonder if you were a bit confused when you left us...'

'I just wanted to say hi and see how you are doing and make sure you understood that we still care and think about you...'

'I miss you (that's why I have some tears in my eyes), but I am really happy for you, that you are with your 'growing-up' family now, and I can see they love you very much.'

'I guess you're feeling anxious/upset/worried at the moment, and wonder why you can't come back to our house?'

'This is your new home and (adopters) are doing all they can to help you feel settled here. I/we get that you might feel sad at times, that you don't live with me anymore.'

'I do 'looking after' work, and there is another child waiting to be 'looked after' by me.'

'I will come and see you again, and we can go out to a (play park or other nearby

facility).'

Adopters suggested phrases could include:

'We will be meeting with (foster carers), but you will still be staying here and coming home with us... this is your family.'

You can also ask the child if they have any questions they want to ask their foster carers?

'We were a bit worried that you would not understand that you are not moving on anywhere else... we are your family now etc.'

It may be that the child will be wondering why they moved, whether and when they will be moved again, so going over all this again may be really helpful for them. All this confusion that he may be experiencing may mean he feels very unsafe. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the child is not forgotten about by their foster carer, but that they will not move on again.

Even though you are saying all the above, we know that actually seeing their former carers, and having it demonstrated physically that they are not going anywhere else, and they are staying with you may be very powerful for them, though it is likely there may be some upset afterwards.

These meetings are likely to be difficult for you, and they may awaken a whole range of emotions in you about being a parent. However, the child needs you to be strong for them. Your child may run to the foster carers with open arms and may be sad when they leave. You can help them with this and be their important person, who comforts them when they feel sad and who understands them. It is a fantastic chance to bond with your child and it will help build your relationship with them in the long term.

We fully recognise that it is likely to be upsetting for you, if the child is upset, but actually this is positive, because they are not burying their emotions.

Sometimes children may seem OK at meeting their foster carers but they may be telling you in other ways that they are sad and missing them. They may be withdrawn or quiet, or have a bad tummy ache, or chew things nervously.

Help them explore these feelings, by wondering if they have a bad tummy because

they are missing their foster carers etc. Say the words out loud for them and help them with their feelings.

Remember foster carers can sometimes struggle with their feelings too, especially at the first meeting. They will also need support from their social worker. The second visit will be better!

If there are any issues where the contact really does not work, your social worker will support you.

From our experience, staying in touch with your child's foster carers really does work!

If distances are too great, electronic means of communication such as Skype or telephone calls are great ways to stay in touch.

Also drawings, post cards etc. can be used in between the meetings, if they meet the needs of your child. After this, it is up to you to manage; you will know what your child needs and what works best for them.

Adopters tell us that there is a range of post-placement contact that takes place. Some foster carers have become godparents or 'aunty and uncle' to the child; other families have regular get-togethers, such as picnics and outings.

What is important is what works for you, and most importantly, your child!

