

Covid 19

Together4Children Permanency Partnership Emergency Practice Guidance Transitions from Foster Care to Adoption V3.0 – Updated 05/05/2020

The following provides guidance about children in the following categories:

- Matched with adopters with an ADM decision
- Linked with adopters and booked into Adoption Panel for a match
- Requiring Early Permanence Placements

This guidance is intended to support decision-making and practice across the Together4Children region, and to link this with practice at a national level.

It is important to note that this guidance does not supersede local guidance. Each LA partner should consider this guidance alongside their own Local Authority's practice guidance through the current period of Covid 19 measures.

A. Key principles

1. To adhere to government guidance re Covid 19 at all times
2. To adhere to all relevant LA Partner guidance in relation to undertaking children's social work duties during the emergency measures
3. Children to move into their adoptive families as promptly and as safely as possible
4. All parties to be in agreement with the process
5. The concerns of all parties will be taken into account
6. New families feel well supported
7. Services respond appropriately to changing needs in early placement support in a safe way
8. Good, safe child-centred practice is key to the long-term stability of placements
9. Trauma-informed and evidence-based practice supports good decision-making for children and their families.
10. Any impact on the long-term stability of the adopted to be taken into consideration.

B. Children Matched with Adopters (with an ADM decision)

Normally Adoption introductions require foster carers and adopters to spend a considerable amount of time in each other's home. Often each party has to spend time in alternative accommodation such as hotels. This is then followed by a period of weekly statutory visits to the new placement for a period of 4 weeks. This practice has developed to ensure continuity for the child and that the placement is meeting the child's needs.

The current Government measures in response to Covid 19 which were introduced on 23.3.2020, mean that this is no longer feasible. In the light of these measures and the level of face to face contact required to allow transitions to take place (even when reduced to a minimum), decisions relating to **any new transitions** will require very careful consideration.

In normal times, the period of transitions creates considerable uncertainty and stress for all involved. When considering or planning any transition currently, we need to take into account the added stress that the Covid 19 pandemic places on carers, adopters, practitioners. Most importantly, we need to recognise the additional stress which children may be experiencing either directly, or through the anxieties of the adults who care for them.

C. Key Factors and Decision-Making

The following factors should be taken into account in relation to progressing a transition under the current exceptional circumstances:

- **All** parties are in agreement that **all** support to the new family can be provided by virtual means
- The assessment of the anticipated level of early placement support is such that virtual means of support will be sufficient
- Transitions plans should reflect the practice guidance and describe the mitigating factors that have been introduced and agreed by all parties
- A risk assessment should be completed providing a balanced analysis of the impact for the child of transitioning in the current environment against remaining in the current placement with the inherent delay.
- Consultation should take place with the LA LAC nurse and/or medical advisor regarding any health implications related to progressing a transition.
- Where agreement between relevant parties cannot be reached, issues should be escalated through management of each area.

In making a balanced assessment of the risks in relation to these decisions, the following circumstances may support a decision to proceed:

- The child cannot remain the foster placement and would have to move to another placement
- The length of delay will have a significant impact on the wellbeing of the child

D. Consideration of Adopters Support Networks

Any decision-making in respect of transitions must pay particular regard to the support available to prospective adopters. Many adopters rely on their parents as a key part of their support network. It is acknowledged that the parents of adoptive families may be in the high-risk group for Covid 19 at the current time.

Were children's placements are proceeding the transition plan should clearly identify all virtual support options for adopters.

This could include:

- Virtual support from wider family and friends

- Virtual peer support from other adopters
- Virtual support from foster carers
- Daily keeping in touch calls from Adoption Social Workers

All transition planning must identify contingency arrangements covering:

- Arrangements for children and adopters where more support is needed than was initially anticipated
- Arrangements to cover key staff roles where workers go off sick.

A high level of practical and emotional support must also be put in place for foster cares supporting transitions at the current time, acknowledging the additional factors created by the Covid 19 pandemic.

E. Decisions to Proceed

The decision to progress from panel and ADM decision to introductions should be made in conjunction with the following parties:

- The LA Adoption Service
- The LA Children's Social Work team
- The Independent Reviewing Officer
- The foster carer
- Their support service/agency
- The adopters
- The adopter's agency (inter-agency placements)
- With regard to the wishes and feelings of the child/ren.

The decision to proceed with a transition should be made by the relevant Service Lead for the Child, with the agreement of the relevant Service Lead for Adoption and a Key Decision should be placed on the Child's record. The Record should identify those party to the decision, and the factors considered in coming to the agreement to proceed, including the safety and support arrangements.

Contact in the foster home may need to be shorter than would have been planned in different circumstances. In such cases it will be important that there is regular virtual contact between the child with their adopted family and foster cares when the child has moved.

F. Public Health Advise on Self-Isolation

Public Health colleagues provide the following advice which should be used to assist risk assessment and planning:

There are known to be cases of asymptomatic carriage of the virus; therefore to ensure that there is no risk of spread of infection from one household to the next, it is advisable that each household undergo 14-days of self-isolation prior to a child moving from one household to the other.

In practice, this means that all members of each household stay at home, avoid mixing with other people and not go out unless it is absolutely necessary i.e. to seek medical attention. More details can be found in the [PHE self-isolation guidance](#).

If anyone becomes symptomatic during this 14-day period, they would need to restart the self-isolation process and timetable for the household. The symptomatic person will need to isolate for 7-days from date of onset of their symptoms, and the remaining members of the household for 14-days from the specified date of onset. A helpful illustration of this can be found [here](#).

Once the child is in a new home, the newly formed household should be treated as one household and follow the national advice.

Testing

Testing of asymptomatic individuals is not routinely recommended, as the individual could have contracted COVID-19 since the time of the test and it is advised that instead a quarantine/self-isolation period of 14 days for members of both households is observed prior to moving.

G. Delay to Introductions

Decisions to delay introductions should be made based on the following factors:

- Early placement support needs in relation to the child are too great to be provided to the family virtually
- Early placement support needs cannot be effectively delivered due to staffing capacity through the pandemic
- The health needs/factors of the foster family including self-isolation of household members
- The health needs/factors of the adoptive family including self-isolation of household members.

In the current circumstances any decision to delay introductions needs to be carefully balanced against any presenting risks relating to the child remaining in their current foster home. It is recognised that a number of children will have their transitions delayed whilst the highest restrictions regarding social distancing are in place.

Where a decision is made to delay introductions consideration should be given, and agreement reached, as to how to build relationships between the child, their foster carers and their adopters virtually in the intervening period. Research from the University of East Anglia highlights the importance of this stage in introductions as a relationship is built between the adopters and foster carers.

This virtual relationship building should be reviewed on a weekly basis and planning to start formal introductions should be considered at each review.

H. Early Permanence/Fostering for Adoption Placements

There will be a continued need for Early Permanence Placements for children at the current time. For approved adopters who have been identified as being able to offer early permanence to a child, the following should be regularly reviewed:

- Their current health and any need to self-isolate.
- Their extended family's current situation and any implications for the adopters
- The adopters previous childcare experience
- Level of support available from family and importantly the professional network - being mindful that this will be virtual

Our key principles are to place children in their permanent placements at the earliest possible stage, whilst complying with government restrictions around Covid 19.

Unlike foster placements where foster carers are likely to have had substantial experience of caring for children, we recognise that foster for adopt placements are generally untested, and the capacity of the adopters to manage the emotional demands of caring for a child for the first time, and managing the uncertainty of FfA is generally unknown at this stage.

Statutory visits will need to be undertaken, and a comprehensive support plan for the adopters must be in place.

In certain circumstances placement via FfA will present as the most sensible, achievable and child-centred option, for example;

Where a baby is being placed via an FFA arrangement from hospital, where the prospective adopters already have a sibling of the child, and the home is stable with no significant presenting support needs.

For all other decisions relating to the placement of children via FfA at the current time, extremely careful consideration will be required. Alongside the consideration of all factors in section B above, the following should also be taken into account:

- The prospective adopter's capacity to manage the fostering role
- The prospective adopter's capacity to manage uncertainty in relation to the outcomes for the child over what may be an extended period of time whilst care proceedings are progressed
- The prospective adopter's capacity to manage contact requirements over a potentially protracted period of time

A timely review of the decision should be timetabled in.

All considerations outlined in Section E above must be addresses including contingency planning requirements.

I. Children Linked with Adopters – Requiring Matching Decisions

All Together4Children Partners are continuing to run remote Adoption Panels. All panels will continue to consider and make recommendation for:

- Adoption Matches – to ensure all decisions required to progress a match can be made in a timely way and are in place, so that planning for transitions based on the guidance in this document can begin.
- Adopter approvals – all prospective adopter assessments that can be concluded in line with statutory requirements will progress to panel.
- Approvals for Adopters who will offer an early permanence placement – to ensure we have sufficient EP placements available for children who should require them

J. Ongoing family finding activity

Family finding activity will proceed in accordance with current Local Authority procedures. This includes:

- Writing profiles and keeping Linkmaker up to date.
- Sharing CPRs and PARs where appropriate.
- Linking visits initially completed by skype to decide if the link should be progressed to a home visit
- Home visits may not be necessary when considering adopters approved within the Together4Children Partnership as their home and households will be well known to the agencies.

K. Resources

Please consider local guidance on communicating with children about the pandemic.

Some useful links:



Child Friendly
Explanation of Corona

<https://emergingminds.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people-with-worries-and-anxiety-coronavirus/>

<https://emergingminds.org.uk/recommended-resources-supporting-children-and-young-people-with-worries-and-anxiety-links/>

https://emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf

