[](https://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/)

**Covid 19 response: Transitions from foster care to adoption through the pandemic**

This paper outlines the interim plans for transitioning children during the Covid -19 pandemic

The Government’s response to the outbreak of Covid 19 and the advice relating to social distancing announced on 23rd March 2020 has as a significant impact on much of the practice of Adopt South West. This is particularly in relation to the transition of children to Adoption Placements.

The Department for Education issued guidance on 03/04/2020. It advises that:

*‘Whilst we, (the DfE) understand that these, (introductory meetings), will be challenging in current circumstances there should not be a blanket ban. There needs to be a case by case, risk-based decision.*

*Regional Adoption Agencies should consider utilising communication technology to continue with the adoption process.*

*We accept that for some children introductory meetings may have to be postponed, but we welcome creativity to prioritise permanent placements for children in line with their best interests.*

**Key principles**

* To adhere to government guidance re Covid 19
* Children to move into their adoptive families as promptly and as safely as possible
* For all parties to be in agreement with the process
* For the concerns of all parties to be taken into account
* For new families to feel well supported
* For the service to be able to respond to changing needs in early placement support as needed in a safe way
* Good safe child centred practice is key to the long-term stability of placements.
* What is in the child’s best interests? How can we do this under current circumstances?

The period of transitions creates considerable uncertainty and stress for all involved. These are strange times and many families both fostering and adoptive are struggling to manage the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic. It is likely that our children will pick up on this and may be feeling the stress of the adults around them as well.

Please consider the guidance attached on communicating with children about this some useful links below:



<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>

Adoption introductions require foster carers and adopters to spend a considerable amount of time in each other’s home, they are in each other’s company solidly for almost 2 weeks. 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 is to ensure continuity for the child and that the placement is meeting the child’s needs.

The minimum of visits will be a statutory visit every week for the first 4 weeks of placement followed by the statutory timeframe of visits. These visits are often shared with childrens teams and the adopter’s agency, Adopt South West or an external agency. In the light of the governments message of 23.3.2020, and the level of face to face contact required through transitions, this will need to be carefully planned

**Transitions will be agreed on a case by case basis**

**All decision making must be recorded on the child’s transition plan, and risk assessment, and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM)** **at match, or for Fostering for adoption placements, agreed by Agency Decision Maker (ADM)** **when agreeing the Reg 25a**

**Transitions Planning**

Transitions Plans should reflect the practice guidance and describe the mitigating factors that have been introduced and agreed by all parties.

Consideration should be given to the level of early placement support that is anticipated, and contingency plans if the level of support is more than anticipated.

The decision to progress from panel to introductions should be made as part of a transitions plan in conjunction with the following parties, and agreed by the child’s Local Authority’s Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

* Adopt South West
* The LA childrens teams
* The foster carer
* Their support agency
* The adopters
* If an inter-agency placement, the adopter’s agency
* Childs IRO

Consideration must be given to the risk assessment

**The Adopters support network**

Like many new parents, many adopters rely on their parents for support. However, they may be in the high-risk group for Covid 19.

**Virtual Support**

Decisions should be agreed and described in the transitions plan as to other virtual support for adopters. This could include virtual peer support from other adopters in the area and daily keeping in touch calls from ASW

**Contingency planning**

* Plans should also be agreed for if the adopters need more support than anticipated.
* Plans should also be made if key staff are off sick.
* Support for adopters if they fall sick

These should be described in the Transitions Plan

* Adherence to the government and local authorities’ guidance re Covid 19 must be the priority consideration
* For this to be recorded on the Transitions Plan

Adopters and foster carers should be asked to complete the Coram Baaf self-declaration form

* [**Emergency Self-Declaration of Health form**](https://corambaaf.org.uk/sites/default/files/coronavirus/health/CoramBAAF%20Covid-19%20emergency%20self-declaration%20health%20form.doc) and this should form part of the transitions plan
* Consultation to take place, where necessary, with the LA LAC nurse and /or medical advisor regarding any health implications related to progressing a transition.
* The health and welfare of all parties to be considered

Any impact on the long-term stability of the adopted family needs to be taken into consideration. We know from practice and research that issues in transition and early placements can have a long-term impact on family relationships

The Risk Assessment needs to be completed which analyses the impact for the child of transitioning in the current environment or remaining in the current placement with the inherent delay.

The decision to proceed with a transition should be made by all involved. This should be agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) at the point of match, or agreement for Reg 25

**Fostering for adoption (FFA) placements**

Our key principles are to place children in their permanent placements at the earliest possible stage, and to comply with government restrictions around Covid 19. Unlike foster placements where foster carers are likely to have had substantial experience of caring for children, 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.

Children placed under FFA are generally not well known to the LA and, if new born, may have significant unidentified health needs.For many FFA carers this their first experience of parenting, and, like many first-time parents, may well need considerable support at this stage.

* Statutory visits will need to be undertaken by Childrens teams or ASW staff.
* ALL parties would need to agree that it is safe for support to be virtual.
* A risk assessment should be completed.
* A review of this decision should be timetabled in.
* A Transitions Plan as described above would need to be completed taking the above factors into consideration and agreed by all relevant parties.

**Delay introductions**

A decision may be reached to delay introductions, if the early placement support needs of the new family are anticipated to be unmet due to staffing capacity through the pandemic, the health needs of the foster family, the adopters etc.

If the decision from all parties is made to delay introductions then 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 describes 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.

It must be acknowledged that these are rapidly changing times and this policy will be reviewed and amended to adjust to changing government guidance.

Under these current circumstances we want to place children in those permanent homes as promptly as possible with the best possible support

Service Manager Adopt South West

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