

Disruptions Guidance: Stability Intervention Meetings and Disruption Reflection Meetings

In the words of two West Sussex young people:

“I moved about a lot, I think I’ve had like 30 something addresses between foster carers, adoption, B&B’s, hostels and rentals. The good things have been I know lots of different areas and have met loads of different people. The bad stuff was it was just tiring, always being unsettled and not sure how long something was going last”

(Care experienced young person)

“I was in a lot of placements, maybe like six I think it was, I think if the foster carers paid enough attention and listened, I mean really listened, not just in the physical sense, but ask us if we understand what they mean, as somethings are not so black and white. It is jumbled for some kids when it’s not what they are trying to get across. No one ever questioned what was up with me...”

(Looked after young person)

Purpose: The above comments capture very clearly what moving on, and not being listened to, can mean for young people. The child or young person **must** come first, and be kept at the centre of discussions, at Placement Stability Meetings and Disruption Reflection Meetings. This policy is intended to cover fostering and residential care both within WSCC and independent agencies.

The processes outlined below were agreed by a working party of representatives across West Sussex Children Looked After teams, the Fostering Service, Residential Care, and Voice of the Child, and is what we agreed 'Good looks like' for children and young people in our care.

The ethos we will create is one of learning: firstly, in order to meet the needs of individual children and young people, so that we create stability and permanence; secondly, in order to apply insight gained from disruptions more generally to future practice within our service.

Stability Intervention Meetings

- The starting point, and most important part of the disruption process, should be a focus on placement stability and **interventions** that aim to achieve this.
- If a child or young person wishes to remain in the placement, and it is in their best interests to do so, all efforts should be made to achieve this.
- Sibling relationships are emotionally powerful and critically important not only in childhood but over the course of a lifetime. As such, social workers should be mindful of the impact of any decision-making on children's relationships with brothers and sisters.

Some thoughts from West Sussex young people about what would help them to stay in their foster placements:

"Professionals should listen- made me feel annoyed because people didn't know why I was getting annoyed"

"Write it down (my views) and send it to professionals as sometimes I don't speak in my meetings or understand what they are saying"

"I go to all my meetings but sometimes I get angry about what is being said so I don't talk. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and Social worker see me separately before the meeting which is good and the IRO asks what may upset me to make sure those things are not brought up"

Timing: A Placement Stability Meeting should be convened at the earliest opportunity once professionals within the child or young person's network become aware that the placement is at significant risk of breaking down.

Decision making:

- **Request:** The request for a Stability Intervention Meeting could be made by the child's carer, social worker, the carer's supervising social worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
- **Decision:** The decision to go ahead should be made at team manager level, once discussions have taken place between the social worker/supervising social worker, and their manager.
- **Management Oversight:** The social worker's manager must record a comment on the child's case notes (also to be added to the Carer's case notes), outlining the reason(s) for holding/not holding a Stability Intervention Meeting.

- **Accountability to Children:** We need to be accountable, both at the time, and in the future, if children look back at case notes, and want to know what help was offered, how key decisions were reached, and how they were involved.

Arranging and chairing Stability Intervention Meetings:

- The child's social worker, in consultation with the Supervising Social Worker/Residential Home Manager, is responsible for arranging the Stability Intervention Meeting.
- **1. Fostering Placements:** The meeting will be chaired by the child's social worker's manager, whether they are internal West Sussex Foster Carer(s) or Family and Friend Foster Carer(s), or Carer(s) from an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).
- The setting up of the meeting should be a collaborative process between the child's social worker, and the supervising worker for the Carer(s), to ensure that the people most relevant to the child attend (see below) at the most suitable venue.
- **2. Residential Care:** The manager of the residential care home will chair and minute the meeting, whether this is a West Sussex home, or independent residential provision.

INDEPENDENT AGENCY PLACEMENTS: Where a Stability Intervention Meeting is needed for a child or young person placed in independent agency foster care or residential provision, reference should be made to the **Provider Response Form** held by the Commissioning Team which can be obtained either by looking at attachments documents for the child on Mosaic or by contacting the Commissioning Team. This form details what each agency has agreed to provide for the individual child or young person in order for it to be successful.

Who should attend the Stability Intervention Meeting:

Those invited, or asked to contribute, should be:

1. The child
2. The child's parent(s) and/or significant person (depending on child's views). The significant person could be a supportive friend.
3. The child's social worker and/or other professional associated with the child (e.g. Personal Adviser or advocate) and manager;
4. For children in foster care, the foster carers and their supervising social worker.
5. For children in residential care, the child's link worker/keyworker and the home manager;
6. The child's independent reviewing officer;
7. Other relevant staff/professionals (e.g. CAMHS, Education, Virtual School, Health professionals. If the foster carers are newly approved it may in some instances be appropriate to invite, or ask for contributions, from their assessor)

Note: It is essential that the child's carers attend this meeting, whether they are West Sussex carers or come from an independent agency.

Format: The social worker and supervising social worker/home manager will agree the best format for the meeting (see [Stability Intervention Meeting format on Tri.x](#)). If the child wishes to attend the meeting, the format should be dictated by the individual child needs/wishes, not by the format of the form.

- If a child or young person would like more support to have their voice heard before, within or after the meeting (even if they don't want to attend) they can contact West Sussex Advocacy Team at <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/support/advocacy/advocacy-request-form/> or make use of the Mind of My Own One App from [GooglePlay](#) or [Apple app store](#).
- If the child does not wish to attend they should be asked whether they would like someone to attend to represent them, or whether they would like to contribute in some other way e.g. passing on a verbal contribution, putting something in writing, via a video contribution-5 minutes max.

The chairperson should also ensure that the child, parent(s), and others who have been asked to contribute, understand the purpose of the meeting, how it will be conducted and are given the opportunity to put their views and suggestions. See [Children's Guide to Stability Meetings](#).

The child should be encouraged to take breaks whenever they need to and be made aware that they do need to remain for the whole of the meeting if they do not wish to.

Venue: If the child is attending the meeting, the venue should, above all, be somewhere that the child feels is safe and OK to meet. If the stability of the placement is in question, this may or may not be the right place; the decision should be based on the individual needs of the child or young person.

Informing the child of the result of the meeting: The Stability Intervention Meeting is likely to have important consequences for the child; therefore, all efforts should be made to inform them within 24 hours. Sometimes it is very difficult for the child or young person to take everything in that they are told. They should also be given a written or video record about the key decisions that they can keep and refer back to.

28-day notice period for placements coming to an end: Carers are expected to give 28 days-notice when ending a child's placement (except for those independent agencies where a separate notice period has been agreed with WSCC).

Transitions: If the child's placement does come to an end, there is a very clear expectation that the move is planned by the child's social worker, and the fostering /residential services are fully involved in these discussions, including use of 'team around the child' meetings.

[Disruption Reflection Meetings](#)

Definition and Purpose: A 'disruption' is something that occurs when the local authority consider that the placement is no longer meeting the child's needs, or the carers decide that they are longer able to care for a child, or the child decides they do not want to stay in the placement, or a combination of these factors.

- A premature ending, or unplanned move of home, is one of the most difficult things that can happen for a child or young person, and for their carers.

- In terms of attachment, trauma and loss, the significance of this should not be underestimated.
- Given the importance of siblings throughout a child's lifetime, a disruption that has resulted in a sibling separation warrants particular attention.

- Disruption Reflection Meetings present an important opportunity, after the disruption has occurred, to reflect, learn and consider how we will apply our learning, so that mistakes are not repeated.

Some thoughts from West Sussex young people about disruptions:

"I would want to go into the meeting with the professionals so I can hear what is being said."

"It is important for me to have my say for example 'do not touch my belongings without my permission' as this is what happened."

"It's important to tell all foster carers (by the Social Worker) to listen to the young person"

Key aims of a Disruption Reflection Meeting:

- To enable the child, carers and other participants to share feelings and information about the placement and disruption
- To identify significant factors leading to the disruption
- To gather information to understand the child's needs better, to inform future care planning with a view to enhancing future placement stability
- To considering the quality of the preparation and support offered to carers, family and child
- If siblings were separated as a result of the disruption, we will need to be able to justify to the children the rationale for our decision-making, in appropriate language
- To identify future contact needs: between separated siblings, and between the child and their previous carers
- Although we are looking at what went wrong, it is also very important to recognise and acknowledge the positives: 'The things that children will keep and take with them'. These will also inform future care planning.
- A meeting may be helpful to bring closure and to encourage further positive steps forward for the child and carer(s).
- Safeguarding –Any placement that disrupted as a result of a safeguarding incident will have been dealt with via safeguarding procedures, but this does not preclude the need for a Disruption Reflection Meeting (see decision-making below)
- Carers: Where appropriate, to consider whether strengths and vulnerabilities identified in the carers' Form F assessment/last annual review are relevant to the disruption, and whether follow-up is needed.
- General: Reviewing data from disruption meetings to inform future care planning and improve practice for Children Looked After across Children's Social Care and Corporate Parenting.
- General: For learning to be made available via workshops and learning events across Children's Social Care Corporate Parenting.

- Independent agencies -Commissioning hold Provider Forums-learning from Disruption Reflection Meetings to be shared, as appropriate, at these forums.

Decision making:

- **Decision:** As for the Stability Intervention Meeting, the decision to go ahead with a Disruption Reflection Meeting should be made at senior management level and may require Senior management/First level manager liaison across teams: Children Looked After/Fostering/Family and Friends/Residential care, depending on where the child was living.
- **Which placements:** Disruption Reflection Meetings should be arranged following unplanned endings for all children and young people who have **been placed with carers for over a year**, unless the senior manager decides that there are good reasons as to why this is unnecessary. There may be some situations where the senior manager feels it is important to hold a meeting to look at why a child or young person's placement broke down in less than a year for example when a child has had a number of moves. In each situation, the decision should be based on the individual circumstances of the child or young person and in conjunction with the child's social worker or manager
- **Management Oversight:** Again, it is essential that the senior manager records a management oversight comment on the child or young person's case notes, and that this is also added to the carer's case notes, outlining the reason(s) for deciding whether or not to hold a Disruption Reflection Meeting.
- **Accountability to Children:** We need to be accountable, both at the time, and in the future, if children look back at case notes, and want to know what happened when their placement broke down, and how we decided whether or not to meet to discuss this.

Timing: Disruptions are difficult for everyone involved. A balance is needed between allowing people some time and space afterwards and holding the meeting within a meaningful timescale. The timing is likely to vary according to individual needs of the child and carers. **A minimum of 4 weeks, after the disruption occurred, and a maximum 12 weeks** is the timescale that we feel is appropriate.

Social Work Report: For every Disruption Reflection Meeting, the child's social worker should prepare a brief report, See **Social Worker Disruption Report (and guidance) on Tri.x**, that should be made available to those attending the meeting **3 days** in advance of the meeting taking place.

Arranging and chairing Disruption Reflection Meeting:

- Given the seriousness of a Disruption Reflection Meeting, and the importance of impartiality, an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), and NOT the child's own IRO, should be approached to chair the meeting in the first instance. If this is not possible it should be chaired by a manager or senior manager who is NOT part of the direct professional network of the child.
- The arrangements for the meeting, including sending out invitations, should be made by the Embedded Coordinator linked to the IRO/ manager chairing the meeting in consultation with the child's social worker.

- **Minutes:** Formal minutes should be taken by an Embedded Coordinator using the Disruption Reflection Meeting Report Form which is on Tri.x.

INDEPENDENT AGENCY PLACEMENTS: Where a **Disruption Reflection Meeting** is needed for a child or young person placed in independent agency foster care or residential provision, reference should be made to the **Provider Response Form**, held by the Commissioning Team which can be obtained either by looking at attachments documents for the child on Mosaic or by contacting the Commissioning Team.. This details what each agency undertook to provide for the individual child or young person, and could contain important information, when considering what went wrong.

Who should attend the Disruption Reflection Meeting:

Those invited, or asked to contribute, should be:

1. The child
2. The child's parent(s) and/or significant person (depending on child's views). The significant person could be a supportive friend.
3. The child's social worker and/or other professional associated with the child (e.g. Personal Adviser or advocate) and manager.
4. For children in foster care, the foster carers and their supervising social worker.
5. For children in residential care, the child's link worker/keyworker and the home manager.
6. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO);
7. Other relevant staff/professionals (e.g. CAMHS, Education, Virtual School, Health professionals. If the foster carers are newly approved it may in some instances be appropriate to invite, or ask for contributions, from their assessor)

Note: Ideally the child's current carers and previous carers (where the placement disrupted) should attend the meeting, whether they are West Sussex carers or come from an independent agency. Where this is not achievable, there should at minimum be written contributions from the carers, and attendance from their supervising social worker.

Format: The chairperson will decide upon the best format for the meeting (see also **Disruption Reflection Meeting Format**). If the child wishes to attend the meeting, the format should be dictated by the individual child needs/wishes, not by the format of the form.

- If a child or young person would like more support to have their voice heard before, within or after the meeting (even if they don't want to attend) they can contact West Sussex Advocacy Team at <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/support/advocacy/advocacy-request-form/> or make use of the Mind of My Own One App from [Google Play](#) or [Apple app store](#).
- If the child does not wish to attend they should be asked whether they would like someone to attend to represent them, or whether they would like to contribute in some other way e.g. passing on a verbal contribution, putting something in writing, via a video contribution-5 minutes max.

The chairperson should also ensure that the child, parent(s) and others who have been asked to contribute understand the purpose of the meeting, how it will be conducted and are given the opportunity to put their views and suggestions. See also [Children’s Guide to Disruption Meetings](#).

The child should be encouraged to take breaks whenever they need to and be made aware that they do need to remain for the whole of the meeting if they do not wish to.

Venue: If the child is attending the meeting, the venue should, above all, be somewhere that the child feels is safe and OK to meet.

Informing the child of the result of the meeting: If the child does not attend this meeting there needs to be an [immediate debrief](#) from an identified person, whoever is best placed, to communicate the outcome of discussions as soon as possible. The debrief also needs to ensure that the child/young person knows how their views were shared. This should be decided at the start of the meeting. Sometimes it is very difficult for the child or young person to take everything in that they are told. One young person commented:

“No one explained anything to me about why I was coming out, so it felt very rushed. It wasn’t explained as to why it had broken down and I still do not understand now. They should sit with the young person (and you should be able to have a family member or friend there for support) and they should tell you what is happening”

Children should also be given a written or video record about the key decisions that they can keep and refer back to.

If the child did attend the meeting, they may need some support afterwards, this must also be considered as part of the process.

Review / Contacts / References	
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