

**Adoption West**

**Early Permanence process**

**Written guidance for social workers**

**Purpose of this guidance:**

Early Permanence (EP) is seen as a positive option for many children who may ultimately be adopted. Being placed with EP carers can reduce the number of moves a child experiences and often means that the child lives with the people who will become their adoptive family at a younger age than they would otherwise have done. For these reasons, Adoption West encourages the use of EP placements for those children who can most benefit from them.

Adopters approved by Adoption West can become Early Permanence carers by being temporarily approved as foster carers by a local authority under Reg 25a of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Fostering Regulations provide a framework for the requirements that foster carers need to meet and how they should be supported and supervised, which apply equally to Early Permanence carers. The six local authorities in the Adoption West region have delegated the supervisory role to Adoption West for those children placed with Adoption West EP carers. However, the local authority retain overall responsibility and this guide therefore sets out the role and responsibilities of Adoption West social workers, including liaison with the local authority.

**Practice Guidance - process:**

The Family Finding Team take EP referrals from the six local authorities and seek a suitable family for the child, facilitating the match and the move. If the child is placed with an Adoption West family, they will then be supervised and supported by their worker from any of the three Adoption West hubs. Below is the practice for Family Finders and supervising Recruitment and Assessment social workers.

**Process for Family Finders:**

**Once an EP referral is received:**

* Family Finding Manager to allocate the case to a family finder and add the details onto the EP tab of the tracker.
* The family finder will check that it is a suitable referral (for example that adopters of any siblings are unable to consider adopting this child too) and will then search for a suitable EP family.
* Once one or more families have been identified, the family finder will share details with the child’s social worker and send them the PARs.
* The family finder will arrange to visit the families with the child’s social worker.
* The social worker for each set of adopters will complete the relevant section in the EP referral form about how their adopters will meet the child’s needs and send to the family finder prior to a linking meeting. If the child has adopted siblings, matching can consider the likelihood of the adoptive families supporting contact with each other.
* The Family Finding manager or Senior Practitioner will chair a linking meeting, and the child’s social worker and team manager will decide whether they feel they have a suitable EP family for the child and wish to proceed. If Adoption West adopters are chosen, the responsibility for fostering supervision is delegated by the local authority to the Adoption West R&A worker. If a family from an external agency is chosen, the Family Finding manager or Senior Practitioner should ask the external agency and the child’s local authority to agree between them who will undertake the fostering supervision for the EP carers.
* If proceeding with the link, the family finder should coordinate the completion of the Reg 25a report, ensuring that the reasons why an EP placement is needed are included in the report. The report should be completed by the child’s social worker and R&A worker and the family finder should send to the ADM for agreement, along with the Foster Care Agreement.
* The Family Finder should check that the R&A worker is sending a copy of the local authority’s Fostering Agreement to the EP carers to sign and return prior to the child moving in with them.
* Once the child has moved to the EP carer, the family finder should add the child to Charms and link the child’s record with the EP carer’s record on Charms (if this is an external placement then the family and agency details should be recorded) and arrange for the child’s details to be moved from the EP tab on the tracker to the main sheet.
* Case responsibility now passes to the R&A worker.

**Process for Recruitment & Assessment workers:**

*Prior to being linked with a child:*

Once carers are approved as ‘suitable to adopt’ by the ADM with advice that they are suitable for Early Permanence, the R&A worker should do the following:

* Support the carers in completing a draft ‘safer care plan’ – this can be finalised once a child is identified, so any specific needs of the child can be included.
* Discuss whether the carer can undertake the Paediatric First Aid training provided by the local authority. As the carers won’t be linked with a child at this stage, this would be from the local authority in which they live. The six local authorities have agreed that EP carers can apply for this training prior to a child being placed, although depending on their waiting list and frequency of courses it may not always be possible to offer a place (see also p7 for details of an online course).
* Discuss the Training, Support and Development Standards with the carers and ensure they know that they will need to be completed within the first year of having a child. Although the majority of EP carers will find that a decision has been made about the child’s plan before they have been living with them for a year, some carers may find that they are still fostering a child after a year, particularly if there are complex court proceedings. Although the worker and carers may decide they will wait before beginning to complete the TSD Standards, some carers may wish to begin them as early as possible. The link for the TSD Standards is [TSD standards workbook for foster carers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook)

*Prior to placement once a link with a child is being made:*

* R&A workers to save the Reg 25a form on the adopter’s Charms file once it has been signed by the ADM of the local authority.
* R&A workers to send the EP carers a copy of the relevant local authority’s Fostering Agreement to sign, and save it onto the EP carers’ Charms file once signed.
* R&A workers to support the EP carers in completing their ‘safer care plan’, to include anything that needs to be considered for the child they will be caring for.
* R&A workers to let the local authority Fostering Link person know once the EP carers are approved so they can set up a fostering file in the local authority, arrange for fostering payments to be set up and arrange for the Fostering Handbook to be sent or shared online with the EP carers (Glos will also arrange a joint visit with the adopters’ social worker to the EP carers).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Local authority** | **Fostering link person** |
| BANES | Merryn O’Connor Merryn\_O'Connor@BATHNES.GOV.UK |
| Bristol | Jo Lewis Jo.lewis@bristol.gov.uk |
| Gloucestershire | Jess RobertsJess.Roberts@gloucestershire.gov.uk |
| North Somerset | Richard FarmerRichard.Farmer@n-somerset.gov.uk |
| South Gloucestershire | Darryll WhitneyDarryll.Whitney@southglos.gov.uk |
| Wiltshire | Jemma ClarkJemma.Clark@wiltshire.gov.uk |

* The R&A worker should remind the child’s social worker that a Placement Planning Meeting to complete the Placement Plan should be arranged as soon as possible, ideally before the child moves in and within five days of the placement being made. If it is an urgent placement with no time to hold a PPM before the child moves in, the R&A worker and the child’s social worker should discuss proposed contact arrangements and support for the family before the child moves in (particularly if placed just before a weekend).
* R&A worker to ensure that the EP carers register the child with their GP and health visitor or midwife as soon as possible, with the aim of early support for the EP carers. Training and support should also be discussed on an ongoing basis with the EP carers (see section on Training and Support on p6 for further information).

*Once the child has moved in:*

* R&A workers should agree visits with the child’s social worker, visiting at least once a week between them until the first LAC Review. The frequency of future visits can be agreed at the LAC Review, but should be at least monthly by the R&A worker, and more frequently if needed, alongside communications via phone, email or online contact. Both workers should share key information about the child and the placement with each other on an ongoing basis.
* R&A workers should complete monthly supervision with the EP carers, using the monthly fostering supervision templates [Fostering monthly supervision template.docx](Fostering%20monthly%20supervision%20template.docx)
* Completed supervision records should be sent each month to the Link worker in the local authority and saved on Charms.
* The foster carer should also be asked to keep daily logs and send them each week to the R&A worker and the child’s social worker. [Foster Carers Diary Sheet.docx](Foster%20Carers%20Diary%20Sheet.docx) The R&A worker should read these, address any issues that arise, save them on the adopter’s Charms record and send the logs to the LA fostering link person. The logs should either be signed by the R&A worker before saving, or a casenote added to say they have been read.
* The R&A worker should also record a summary of any contact with the EP carers, child’s social worker or any other relevant person on Charms. Some of this may be via emails but should also include a summary of any visits, telephone calls or other communications made. Any other key documents, such as LAC Reviews, should also be saved on the adopter’s file.

*When the placement ends:*

There are two ways an EP placement will end – if the child moves to live with their parents or a connected person, or if a Placement Order is made and the child is matched with the adopters.

* If the child leaves the EP carers, even if the EP carers are in support of the move, they are likely to have mixed emotions and support for them should be considered and put in place (for some families, this may include some counselling sessions as well as support from their social worker).
* If the EP carers wish to continue to adopt or provide another EP placement the R&A worker should undertake an adopter review with them, whether or not they have been approved for a year, as they have experienced a significant change. The review should consider when or whether they might be ready to have another child placed with them.
* For children where adoption becomes the sole plan a linking meeting should take place, chaired by a manager or deputy team manager. The linking meeting should seek everyone’s views about the proposed match and a decision reached about whether to proceed.
* If the decision is made to proceed, the Chair of the linking meeting should also cover the following points:
* Ensuring the CPR has been amended in relation to any previous advice given, and brought up to date (the guidance ‘Updating the CPR’ can be given to the child’s social worker)
* Ensuring that the prospective adopters are given an up to date copy of the CPR
* To plan for the Adoption Placement Report to be completed with the adopters’ views included. This should include what support will be provided, post adoption contact arrangements and delegation of PR.
* Plans for the EP carers to meet the birth parents, and for a Child Information Meeting to take place
* Whether a referral needs to be made to Birth Links for support for the birth parents and possibly other relatives, if this isn’t already in place
* Booking the match into panel (this should be planned for four weeks after the Placement Order is expected to be made, and paperwork will need to be submitted two weeks before the panel date)
* Arranging an appointment for the EP carers to meet with the Medical Adviser (this should be booked as early as possible to ensure that the appointment can take place before panel, and ideally before the paperwork is submitted)
* If the match proceeds, once the Agency Decision Maker makes a decision about the match after adoption panel, the placement becomes an adoptive one from the date of the ADM decision and the EP fostering placement ends. Panel Admin will update the tracking spreadsheet and the R&A worker should update Charms and contact the link person in the local authority to ensure that the fostering payments end from that date.

**Training and support for EP carers:**

* All EP carers will have already completed a half day training session in Stage 1 and a full day’s training in Stage 2 of their assessment. All local authorities offer and encourage EP carers to attend the following training sessions:
* Paediatric First Aid
* Safeguarding/child protection

Gloucestershire also suggest that EP carers undertake their Infant Care training. BANES offer some attachment training with their team’s psychologist (although this may be not be very frequent). All local authorities offer a range of training sessions, and the R&A social worker should discuss the training programme with the EP carers, and decide together any others which might be useful. To access any training provided by the local authority, the social worker for the EP carers should arrange this through the link person.

* Online training about caring for babies and very young children is also available, and the following training programmes may be helpful (please be aware when discussing with your carers that the language used reflects that these courses are aimed primarily at parents):
* Free 2 hour baby care workshop (specific dates/times offered) <https://mybabyacademy.co.uk/free-online-workshop/>
* Baby and Child First aid app (free to download)

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/baby-and-child-first-aid/>

* EP carers can also join the Support Through Early Permanence (STEP) Group, a facilitated group in the Adoption West run by an EP carer. See [STEP Group - The Centre (ccsadoption.org)](https://www.ccsadoption.org/the-centre/events-calendar/step-group/) for further details.
* Alongside social work support, the LAs also offer the following to EP carers:
* Membership of the Fostering Network (BANES offer membership of Fostering Network or an alternative fostering organisation)
* Out of hours support – see table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Local authority** | **Out of hours support for EP/foster carers** |
| BANES | 01225 396494 (5-11pm Mon–Fri; 9am–11pm weekends and Bank Holidays)  |
| Bristol | 0117 3521062 or 07795091345 (5pm-midnight) |
| Gloucestershire | Placement Support Team 07775 575531(8am until 10pm Monday to Saturday; 2pm to 10pm Bank Holidays and Sundays): |
| North Somerset | No fostering Out of Hours line, but in an emergency the carers can call the Emergency Duty Team on 01454 615165 |
| South Glos | 07909881799 (5-10pm Mon-Fri; 9am-10pm Sat-Sun) |
| Wiltshire | 07909 938254 (17.20pm to midnight Monday to Friday; 8am to midnight on weekends and Bank Holidays) |

**For EP carers approved for over a year:**

For the majority of EP carers, a decision about the child will be made well before the child has lived with them for a year. However, some EP carers may find that they are still fostering the child after a year, particularly if there are complex court proceedings. In those cases the Regulations require the supervising social worker to undertake the following:

* An unannounced visit should be made to the EP carers within the first year of approval.
* For EP carers approved under Reg 25a an annual review of their fostering approval isn’t needed, but an adoption annual review should take place.
* All foster carers are required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within a year of being approved as foster carers. It’s advised that R&A workers start discussing the TSD Standards with EP carers by the time the child has been living with them for six months if a Placement Order isn’t looking imminent, to avoid extra pressure to complete them quickly later on.

**Other fostering arrangements:**

*Reg 24 placements:*

A Reg 24 placement allows someone connected to a child to be temporarily approved as their foster carer for a time limited period whilst a full assessment of them is undertaken. For children with a plan for adoption this is most likely to be the adopters of a previous sibling. It will usually be a social worker from the local authority kinship team who will undertake the Reg 24 assessment, which has to be completed within 16 weeks (although agreement can be given to extend by a further period of up to eight weeks). The adopters will therefore need to be re-assessed and approved as adopters within those timescales, in which case they can convert to a Reg 25a placement or, if a Placement Order has been made, it may be possible to bring the match to panel within those timescales and, if the ADM approves the match, the placement will become an adoptive one.

A Reg 24 placement offers the same benefits to a child as a Reg 25a placement, allowing them to be placed with the family that may become their permanent family at a younger age than they would otherwise be. However, because legally this doesn’t meet the criteria for an EP placement, the carers will not be entitled to adoption leave or pay until the placement either becomes a Reg 25a placement prior to the making of a Placement Order, or an adoptive one after the ADM has agreed the match.

*Placements made after a Placement Order:*

Occasionally a child may need to move from their foster carer after a Placement Order has been made but before the match with adopters can be brought to panel and agreed by the ADM. These situations should be rare and not be used as a way of pre-empting panel, but may avoid the child having to have an extra move, for example if there are reasons they need to leave their foster placement urgently, such as ill health of the foster carer. Reg 25a can still be used in this situation, however as a Placement Order has already been made this would not be considered an EP placement and so the carers would not be entitled to adoption leave or pay at that point, and this could only begin from the point the placement becomes an adoptive one, after panel and the ADM decision.