



BIRMINGHAM  
CHILDREN'S TRUST

# **Contact Service**

# **Worker's Handbook**

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## 1. Introduction

The role of a Contact Worker is a special and unique one, providing opportunities for children in care to spend precious physical and emotional time with their family and friends. This handbook has been written to support you in providing a safe, effective and positive contact service for Birmingham Children's Trust and every Contact Worker is expected to familiarise themselves with its contents.

Where the Children's Trust's policies and Practice Guidance are referred to, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have read and understood them in relation to your job role and responsibilities.

Copies of the policies and Practice Guidance referred to in this guidance are available on People Solutions and/or online at <http://birminghamcs.proceduresonline.com/>. Copies are also kept in the Contact Managers office for employees who do not have direct access to People Solutions.

Where reference is made to Birmingham Children's Trust employees in this handbook, this includes those employed by the Trust directly, agency staff, those on short or long term contracts and those working for private companies and voluntary organisations contracted to carry out work for Birmingham Children's Trust.

**Agency Contact Workers:** If you are an agency worker you are expected to use this handbook to support and inform your practice. However some agencies will have their own policies and Practice Guidance that will need to be followed in certain circumstances. Please check with your agency if you are uncertain about any aspect of this.

## 2. Safeguarding and Child Protection

Birmingham Children's Trust is committed to protecting the rights of individuals whilst safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

All staff working for the Trust, whether employed directly or indirectly, are expected to apply Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board procedures, in line with the guidance document Working Together to Safeguard Children and any other Practice Guidance relevant to their role, in the day to day delivery of their work.

Any concerns about the safety of a child should be reported immediately to a Contact Manager during the working day. If out of hours, contact should be made with the Emergency Duty Team (EDT), on 0121 675 4806 or 0121 464 9001.

All Contact Workers are subject to an enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check, previously known as a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check. This will be carried out prior to the commencement of employment with the Trust or start of any contractual arrangements.

**The disclosure of criminal convictions and cautions whilst in employment**

**with Birmingham Children's Trust must be disclosed immediately.**

You are required to disclose details to your manager if you are arrested, charged, cautioned or prosecuted for any offence whilst in employment with Birmingham Children's Trust. Failure to disclose any such convictions may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.

In respect of road traffic offences, if your employment is subject to a DBS check, and/or you are required to drive as part of your work, you should always inform the Children's Trust.

### **3. Code of Conduct Policy Statement**

Members of the public who use our services are entitled to receive conduct of the highest standards of all Children's Trust employees.

Public confidence in an employee's integrity would be compromised if there were the slightest suspicion that he or she could be influenced in any way by improper motives.

Children's Trust employees must behave professionally at all times and conduct themselves beyond the reach of any suspicion of dishonesty.

Employees must not subordinate their duty to their private interests or put themselves in a position where duty and private interests conflict. They must not make use of their employment to further those interests but neither should their private affairs be ordered so as to allow the suspicion to arise that a trust has been abused or a confidence betrayed.

In general, the Children's Trust will not be concerned with an employee's private activities as long as his/her conduct in those activities does not bring discredit upon the Trust.

The Trust will not attempt to preclude employees from undertaking additional employment, but any such employment must not, in the view of the Children's Trust, conflict with or react detrimentally to the interests of the Trust, or in any way weaken public confidence in the conduct of Children's Trust business.

An employee of Birmingham Children's Trust must be respectful and courteous to all people with whom his/her duties bring him/her in contact.

Chief Officers may also apply their own guidelines for employees to follow within their individual departments.

### **4. First Aid and Medication**

Medication must never be administered by a Contact Worker unless there is an instruction from the Social Worker or the child is at risk, e.g. asthma inhaler.

All Contact Workers should hold a current, certificated paediatric first aid qualification.

## 5. Health and Safety

The Children's Trust recognises and accepts its responsibility for the provision and maintenance of a safe and healthy working environment and for taking all steps that are reasonably practicable to achieve this objective.

Health and Safety Policies have been developed to ensure compliance with legislation and provide a framework for defining responsibilities at all levels of the organisation and for all employees. These are available on People Solutions or within your own organisation if this is not Children's Trust.

Contact Workers are expected to ensure that their working environment, including their own motor vehicles if used for transporting children, is safe and fit for purpose. If at any time a vehicle is not roadworthy or has other faults that could put a child or worker at risk then it should not be used. A manager must be informed immediately by telephone if there are health and safety risks with a contact venue/room. This should also be reported immediately to the person in charge of the facility.

**NEVER use a contact room that is not fit for purpose.** A copy of the Contact Venue Standards to be followed is available online, as outlined in Section 1 of this document.

## 6. Lone Working Policy

Contact Workers must abide by Birmingham Children's Trust Lone Working Policy.

## 7. Confidentiality

Personal information about Children's Social Care clients shared with Contact Workers is subject to the Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. As a guide:

- Do not discuss any aspect of their case with parents or children, unless it involves a safeguarding issue, in which case the formal Practice Guidance should be followed.
- Do not discuss clients with other clients, other Contact Workers or professionals.
- Do not discuss personal facts about yourself with clients.
- Do not share your personal contact details with clients.
- Do not write derogatory comments about clients, Social Workers or other professionals in any report (or anywhere else), including on social media.
- Do not leave client information lying around. Ensure that it is stored in the appropriate place.

Contact Workers will only be given case information that is relevant to the contact.

Failure to adhere to these conditions may result in disciplinary action.

## 8. Safer Driving Policy

Contact Workers who transport children as part of their duties must abide by the Birmingham Children's Trust Safer Driving Policy.

## 9. Transporting and Escorting Children

Always carry a full set of contact numbers in case of accident or incident. They should be marked confidential.

Children should be transported in the rear passenger seats of cars wherever possible. Car seats must be used as appropriate to the age of the child. Child locks must always be used on rear doors.

Contact Workers must not physically carry two children at the same time. When a Contact Worker is responsible for two or more children, who are unable to walk independently, assistance should be requested when moving between cars and buildings. Unless a risk has been identified, parents are expected to help with this. Where possible, venue staff should be given adequate notice that assistance will be required.

Contact Workers must always sign themselves and the child(ren) in and out of contact venues.

Children will usually be returned to their placement address and handed over directly to the Foster Carer. Occasionally the carer will request that children are returned to them at a different address or to a backup carer. This should always be checked and authorised by a manager.

Journeys should be planned in advance to ensure that you are familiar with how to reach your destination and be on time.

**Never reveal children's placement details, area or route taken to parents.**

## 10. Car Seats

Recommended car seats, that are age and weight appropriate, must be fitted in accordance to the manufacturer's instructions. Car seats should be checked regularly.

For children under 3, the child **MUST** use the correct child restraint at all times.

Children aged 3 and above, until they reach EITHER their 12th birthday OR 135cm in height, **MUST** use the correct restraint (booster seat or cushion), where seat belts are fitted.

**It is the driver's legal responsibility to ensure that the child is correctly restrained.**

## 11. Accidents and Incidents

If an accident or incident occurs whilst you are responsible for children you must make sure that they are safe.

If the accident/incident is serious you must contact the emergency services first, then a Contact Manager or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on 0121 675 4806 or 0121 464 9001 if you are working out of hours. You must also inform the foster carer when you take the child back to their placement.

If the accident or incident is child protection related then it must be reported following usual safeguarding guidance.

All accidents and incidents must be reported immediately.

## 12. Supervising Contact

The Contact Worker's role is to facilitate contact between children and their parents. During supervised contact you should:

1. Never leave children alone under any circumstances.
2. Only allow persons named on the profile to attend contact.
3. Encourage interaction as appropriate, e.g. if it is clear that the parent does not know what to do, but avoid taking over.
4. Ensure that other than welcomes and goodbyes, conversation with the parents is kept to a minimum and confined to issues directly related to contact.
5. Time for goodbyes should be built into the contact session to avoid impacting on travel time.
6. If children are distressed at the end of contact, encourage the parent(s) to leave first. Explain clearly why this is necessary. This can be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
7. Ensure that throughout supervised contact the safety of the child(ren) is paramount.
8. Your role is to observe the entire session. You should not make or receive calls, text, play games or read messages on your mobile phone; read newspapers or distract yourself in any other way during the contact session.
9. Record all relevant activity and dialogue in full after the session has ended to ensure that you do not miss any useful observations.
10. You must record any marks/bruises you observe on the child. This should be reported immediately in line with the safeguarding Practice Guidance.
11. Report any conversation or behaviour during contact that raises a concern around the safety of the child. Intervene as necessary.
12. All family members attending contact must be listed on your profile details - never allow anyone to attend contact if they are not authorised by the Social Worker and listed on the details you have. You will be notified in advance of any changes to this, including the attendance at contact of other professionals.

13. If parents have queries or request changes to arrangements they must be advised to contact the Social Worker themselves. Never agree to pass on messages to other professionals from parents or other professionals.
14. Parents should be encouraged to interact with the children during contact. Discourage parents from using their mobile phone during contact. Reading newspapers etc. is also discouraged unless the child is asleep and secure.
15. Report to your manager any problems that arise that make supervised contact difficult, e.g. extra support is required, unsuitable contact room.

### **13. Contributing to a Child's Life Story Book**

Contact Workers are expected to contribute whenever possible to a child's Life Story Book. Birmingham Children's Trust's [Life Story Book Policy](#) contains useful information on the important role they play in a child's life. Please also refer to the [Life Story Contributions: Making a Difference to a Child's Life and Life Story Book Guidance for Supervisors and Accompanying Sample Letters](#) for further information.

### **14. Recording Forms**

Contact Workers are required to keep a record of the contact session. There is a specific template for this. Only factual information must be recorded - no analysis or personal opinions. Parents cannot view or discuss what you have written during contact. They can however request to see it via the Social Worker.

Your reports may be presented in court. Additionally, you may also be requested to attend court.

Never leave any documents/reports unattended.

### **15. Contact Rooms and Venue**

Parents and children are expected to leave the contact room in a clean and tidy condition before they depart. Tidying should start 10 minutes before the session ends so that contact can finish on time.

Should you have any concerns about the room or venue, the Maintaining Contact Venue Standards Guidance should be followed.

### **16. Cancellations, Lateness and Non-Attendance**

Contact Workers will be notified of cancelled contact sessions as soon as possible. Where it is practical you will be assigned other appropriate duties.

The worker on reception duty will usually notify the Social Worker, Foster Carer and venue as appropriate. The Social Worker will usually contact the parents, but on occasion the reception worker may need to do this if the number is available. There may also be times when it will be appropriate for the Contact Worker to inform the Social Worker, carer and venue.



Always wait for **20 minutes** for the parents before cancelling contact. Inform the Contact Manager before leaving the venue to return the child back to the Foster Carer. The reason given for lateness should always be recorded. Likewise a cancelled contact report form must be completed if the parents do not turn up.

If you are running late it is important to get a message to the venue. They will notify the parents if they are already present. Extend the contact wherever possible so that the child and his/her parents do not miss out on the valuable time that the contact provides. Note: Parents will have been told before their first contact that the session will not be extended because of *their* lateness.

## 17. Changes to Contact Arrangements

Contact Workers will be informed of any changes to contact arrangements e.g. venue, who can attend, times etc. by the Contact Organiser.

If parents request changes to the contact arrangements or additional attendees the Contact Worker should not indicate a willingness to accommodate this request. The parents must be advised to direct these requests directly with the Social Worker.

If the Contact Worker has to cancel an appointment, they must give the Contact Manager a **minimum of 24 hours** notice in order to allow sufficient time to make alternative arrangements.

Contact cancelled on the day should only be made in **very exceptional circumstances such as in an emergency**. If this happens and alternative arrangements have not been possible a completed cancelled contact record should be placed on file.

**NOTE: Notifying the Contact Manager of a cancellation within 3 hours of an appointment is not acceptable to the service requirements or within the timeframe expected of external providers.**

## 18. Aggression and Violence

Any act of violence or aggression must be reported to a Contact Manager immediately. If it is required West Midlands Police must be called and informed. Any Contact Worker who has been subjected to physical assault, harassment, threatening behaviour, verbal abuse or other violent conduct by a parent or a member of the public must fill in an incident form.

Further information is available in the Violence at Work Guidance.

## 19. Mobile Phones

Contact Workers should have their mobile phone switched on at all times during work hours. To avoid disruption/distraction it should be on silent/vibrate during contact sessions.

The safety of children in contact sessions is paramount. The Contact Worker is therefore required to observe the entire session and should not be distracted in any way as this could pose a risk to the child.. The use of a mobile phone to make or receive calls; text, play games or read messages during the contact is **not allowed**.

At no time should mobile phones be used whilst driving, including hands free.

## 20. Responding to an Abduction

The risk of abduction of children will have been assessed before any contact arrangements are made but if a Contact Worker has concerns that this might happen, or if it does happen, the Police should be contacted on 999 straight away. The Contact Manager must also be immediately informed. If this happens during out of hours working the EDT must be notified on 0121 675 4806 or 0121 464 9001.

## 21. Receiving and Giving Gifts

Nominal gifts to the value of £5 or less, **not money**, may be given to children by Contact Workers for birthdays only.

## 22. Smoking Cigarettes

Contact Workers who smoke cigarettes should only do so when on official breaks and not on Birmingham Children's Trust premises. You should not smoke in your private vehicle during working hours.

Parents should also be discouraged from leaving the contact in order to smoke cigarettes.

## 23. Appearance

Contact Workers are representatives of Birmingham Children's Trust and should present themselves in a professional manner. They should wear clothing that is both practical and appropriate for the role and responsibilities.

## 24. Compliments, Comments and Complaints

If anyone has a compliment, comment or complaint about the contact service this should be recorded on a Contact Service Feedback Form. All the forms used for the contact service can be accessed from the [Practice Guidance's documents library](#).

The Contact Worker is also able to use this form to log their own compliment, comment or complaint so that issues they observe during the contact can be formally brought to the attention of the Contact Manager.

## 25. Training

Contact Workers will be expected to attend training courses on all of the following:

- Safeguarding/child protection
- First aid
- Health and safety related activity
- Effective contact supervision, observation and recording