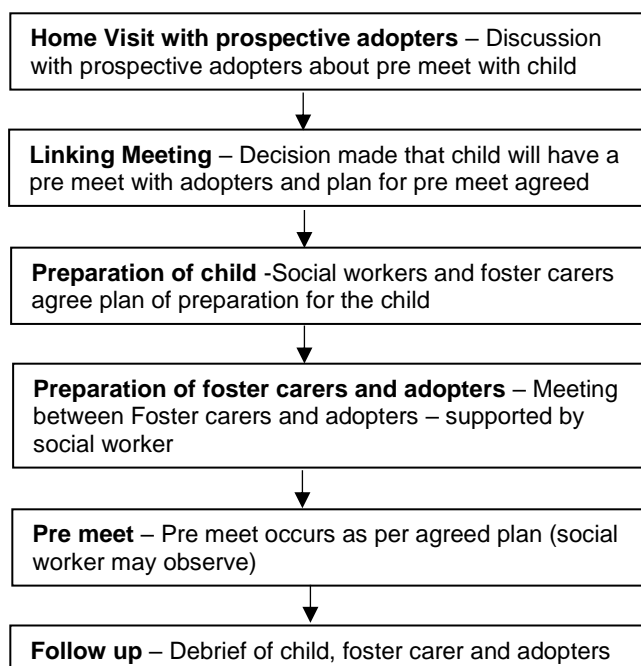


Practice guidance on managing pre meets and the expectations of the meetings for social workers and team managers.

[Coram BAAF Practice Note 64 'Best practice in meetings between prospective adopters and children prior to matching'](#) should be read in conjunction with this guidance.



What are pre meets?

Pre meets are where children can meet prospective adopters in a neutral venue for 30-60 minutes prior to matching panel to establish if there is a connection in their relationship.

“Pre-meet opportunities are not a “trial run”, but rather an opportunity to further cement the link between the child and prospective adopters, to seek additional observational evidence ahead of the matching panel, and to reduce the risks of an early disruption due to unrealistic expectations or a failed “chemistry” between the prospective adopters and the child” (CORAM BAAF, 2017).

How is it decided if a child should have a pre meet?

Every child is different, for some children a pre meet may not be considered appropriate or necessary. Equally, some adoptive families may not wish to meet the child prior to matching panel. Any child can be considered for a pre meet. We know from experience that pre meets are generally undertaken for children aged over 4 years old, sibling group, children with complex needs and for children where they may be joining an adoptive family where there are already children in the home.

Adopt South West are committed to offering pre meets for those children that it is agreed for to support linking and matching. Adopt South West Family Finding team will discuss with the LA social worker the opportunity for the child to have a pre meet during the family finding process. The decision if it should be considered should be discussed at a home visit when meeting prospective

adopters and this decision along with the plans for the pre meet confirmed at the linking meeting. All parties need to be happy to proceed and disagreements raised with the LA Team Manager.

How is everyone prepared for a pre meet?

Good planning and preparation are essential – so everyone knows what is expected and the child is central to the plan. At the linking meeting the below points will be discussed and any issues and plans to prepare and support will be recorded within the linking meeting, this will also include any arrangements for a social worker to observe the pre meet.

Reminder to all that the prospective adopters are not to be left alone with the child/ren and that any physical interaction, such as holding hands is initiated by the child/ren and appropriate. Remember the prospective adopters are strangers to the child/ren.

Managing the emotional risks for children, foster carers and prospective adopters is a challenge. Understanding and responding to the expectations and anxieties of all participants is key to the success of transitions that involve pre meets.

Preparation of the child/ren

Adopt South West recommend that everyone is open and honest with the child about the purpose behind meeting their potential new family and has produced pre meet guidance for foster carers and adopters and preparation materials for children that their foster family and social worker can use prior to the meeting.

- The social worker and foster carer should explain the purpose of the pre meet and that this is one of many ways in which the social worker is trying to find the right family for the child.
- The child should be reassured that the foster carers will be with them throughout the meeting and they will be returning home with their foster family.
- The child should be reassured that they do not have to talk about anything or answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Social workers and foster carers should be honest and let the child know that there is no guarantee that a certain family will be the right one, but that the child should focus on having a good time and enjoying any activities during the meeting.
- If the adopters do not express interest in the child after the pre-meet, the child should be told that the people enjoyed meeting and playing with them, and that the social worker and foster carer want to consider other people too – ‘We want to get the right family for you’.

(CORAM BAAF, P:3: 2017)

Preparation of foster carers

The preparation of the foster carers is very important and cannot be underestimated. It is vital that the foster carers’ social worker is fully involved in the planning for the pre meet and it is recorded how they will support the foster carers.

- We know that foster carers must be “signed up” to the plan for adoption. If there is any doubt about this, it may be better to assign the preparation for and attendance at the pre-meet to a social worker familiar to the child. This should be discussed at the linking meeting.
- Foster carers are expected to undertake the professional role of moving children on; however, they must have good support to help them manage the task.

- Time is needed for social workers and foster carers to work together and agree an approach to the pre-meet.
- The foster carers and adopters should meet prior to the pre meet.
- The foster carer should always be prepared to remain with the child and not extend or change or add to the agreed format of the pre meet. (CORAM BAAF, P:3: 2017).

Preparation of adopter/s

Meeting children who are waiting for a family can be overwhelming for adopters and they are bound to feel nervous and anxious on the day. Like foster carers it is important that their social worker is fully involved in planning for the pre meet and it is recorded how they will support the adopters before and after.

- The adopters and foster carers should meet prior to the pre-meet and be well prepared for it.
- It is helpful for the prospective adopters and foster carers to discuss a script for any difficult questions that could arise from the child.
- Adopters may need to be reminded that children should not be asked if they want to be adopted or about their birth family.
- Adopters should not talk to foster carers about the child in the child's presence or make any promises about seeing the child again.
- It is difficult for children to manage expectations if adopters bring or promise gifts. There should be agreement that no photos will be taken.

On the day of Pre Meet

Agreement and plans for a pre meet will be confirmed at the linking meeting. The pre meet should not take place until the prospective adopters have received the child's CPR, carers report, adoption medical and had the opportunity to meet with the medical advisor. The pre meet is not an exercise for asking questions, but an opportunity to explore the connection between the children and prospective family. On the day everyone should be clear about the arrangements.

- The suggested length of a pre-meet is between 30 and 60 minutes, if the meeting needs to be shortened, this is fine.
- The meeting location should be child-friendly, not too busy and in an environment that is not too distracting for the child. There should be an element of privacy for all parties.
- The meeting should be in a place that is seen as safe, informal and familiar by the child.
- The pre-meet opportunity may only lend itself to an observation, without an expectation of interaction.

Follow-up

Adopt South West recommends seeking feedback from the child, foster carers and prospective adopters at the earliest opportunity- this should be provided to the family finding social worker and recorded within the child's adoption file, any issues raised addressed accordingly and noted within the Adoption Placement Report if the link proceeds to matching panel.

Reference

Beaumont, S and Dibben, E (2017) PRACTICE NOTE 64; Best practice in meetings between prospective adopters and children prior to matching; London: CORAM BAAF.