



**Adoption  
Central  
England**

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## Practice Guidance

# Birth Parent and Adopter Meetings

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 When care planning for a child transitioning to adoption, there is an expectation that at least one meeting between birth parents (as well as any other relevant birth family members) and adoptive parents will be considered in all cases. These meetings provide the opportunity for the most important adults in the child's life to meet and to gain some sort of understanding of one another and to exchange information to support the needs of the child.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 Birth parent and adoptive parent meetings enable:

- Birth parents to add to the adoptive parents' understanding of the child, including the sharing of information that no-one else may know i.e. why they were given their name.
- The laying of foundations for more meaningful and positive post adoption contact, any future letterbox exchanges and or direct contact are far more likely to be beneficial when the parties involved have met.
- Birth parents to experience the people who will be caring for their child, to hopefully allow the birth parents to develop some acceptance of the adoption, being reassured by the adoptive parents that the child's history and story will be shared openly with them.
- Adoptive parents to develop a greater understanding and awareness of the birth parents and who they are as people, to be able to share with their child at a later date a fuller picture in relation to birth parents, their history and experiences.
- The child to know that their birth parents and adoptive parents have met, so that adoptive parents can speak of first-hand knowledge of their child's birth parents.

## 3. Planning

- 3.1 **Who should be involved in birth parent and adoptive parent meetings?**

Meetings should not be rushed and should not take place during transitions for a child, unless there are specific reasons for them taking place at this time that have been agreed by both ACE and the local authority.

The following people should be included in the meeting:



- **Birth parents**, there should be a clear decision whether separate meetings should be held for birth parents, or if it is possible for both birth parents to meet the adoptive parents together.
- **Adoptive parents**, unless there is a specific reason not to attend the meeting due to safeguarding concerns. Where the prospective adopters are a couple, both should be present for the meeting with the birth parent/s.
- **Family Connexions social worker** to support, advise and prepare the birth parents for the meetings.
- **Adoption social worker** to support, advise and prepare the adoptive parents for the meetings.
- **Child's social worker**, unless this would be detrimental to the purpose of the meeting however in all cases they should be included and involved in the planning and preparation of the meeting.

### 3.2 Where should birth parent and adoptive parent meetings take place?

The venue for meetings should be carefully considered. The meeting should take place in a neutral and informal setting which does not hold any upsetting memories for the birth parent/s. Children's Services offices or contact centres may not be the most appropriate venue. The venue should be easily managed with regards to safety and confidentiality and enable there to be separate areas for the birth parent/s and adoptive parent/s to meet with their respective support workers, prior to and after the meeting has taken place.

The social workers will need to consider how best to schedule arrivals and it is important that birth parents and adopters are not expected to wait in an area together, outside of the meeting arrangements.

Adopters – the adoption social worker should make arrangements to meet with the adopters prior to the meeting and it may be beneficial for the social worker to drive the adopters to the meeting venue to avoid any issues with regards to vehicles.

Birth parents – the Family Connexions social worker or child's social worker supporting the birth parent/s should make arrangements to meet with the birth parent prior to the meeting, either at the venue or close by.

### 3.3 Health and Safety considerations

Birth parent and adopters meetings are an important part of the adoption process and should always take place where possible. Therefore, if there are



any risks to personal safety from birth family members that would make a face to face meeting too high a risk then other means of enabling birth parents and adopters to share should be considered.

These include:

- Online meetings as opposed to a face to face meeting, facilitated by the social workers.
- Conference call between the birth parent and adopters, where it is felt that visual contact would pose a direct risk. This should be facilitated by the social work teams.
- Letter and question exchange, where contact and discussion between the birth family and adopters can still be considered but via written exchange of information rather than any direct contact. This should be facilitated by the social work teams and be completed in a timely manner.

The meeting will not go ahead if the birth parents' behaviour (or that of anyone supporting them) is aggressive or erratic, or if birth parents are incoherent due to the use of alcohol/drugs. Where there are any concerns about the potential conduct of birth parent/s then a Risk Assessment should be undertaken by the child's social worker, to enable a safety plan to be put in place. This should be completed in liaison with Family Connexions who will be offering support and advice to the birth parents.

## **4. The meeting**

The meeting should be kept as informal as possible and where needed the social workers present should help to guide conversation and to ensure safety and confidentiality is maintained.

If birth parents would like to give the adopters something to pass on to the child as keepsake, this has to have been agreed beforehand and all parties are to be made aware that this will be happening. Any items passed over should be appropriately checked by the child's social worker and/or ACE adoption social worker, prior to the adopters taking any items home.

### **4.1 Meeting photos**

In the course of the meeting adopters and birth parent/s will probably be asked if they are willing to have their photo taken together. This may feel very uncomfortable but having a photo will prove to the child that the meeting really did take place and the photos are likely to be very important for the child in the future. They may be included in their Life Story Book. The photos are for the



child and so, for reasons of confidentiality, copies will not be given to the birth parent/s.

#### 4.2 **Written Record**

A written record of the meeting will be made with a view to it being shared with the child at some point in the future so it needs to be written with the child in mind. It is to be agreed between the social workers who will take responsibility for recording what is said. They will include details of who was present (but only the first names of the adopters), where the meeting took place, whether photos were provided and the information that was exchanged. Copies of the record will be forwarded to those birth family members who were present but will include no identifying information regarding the adopters. A copy of the meeting and any photos taken will also be kept on the child's adoption case record for future reference.

#### 4.3 **After the Meeting**

Adopters and birth parent/s should be offered support to talk about the meeting sometime after it has happened. These are very emotional occasions and adopters and birth parent/s will feel nervous and anxious before the meeting and relieved afterwards. Adopters and birth parent/s may also have a range of other feelings including anger, numbness, deep sadness, suspicion, confusion and reassurance. These are normal feelings to experience, and support should be provided to adopters and birth parent/s as needed.

### 5. **Suggested topics for discussion (birth parents and adopters)**

If birth parent/s have any photos of other important family members, or of the child as a new born/younger child, it can be really helpful for birth parent/s to bring them to the meeting. They will provide a good talking point and can often prompt important memories that the adopters can pass on to the child.

#### **Birth parents may ask adopters:**

- In what ways are you going to keep my child safe and care for them?
- What opportunities will my child have?
- Is anyone you know or in your family adopted?
- What is your family like?
- Will my child have any brothers or sisters or cousins?
- What is your neighbourhood or town like?
- What's your typical day or week like?
- What do you do for work?



- How will you explain to my child they are adopted?
- How will you talk about me with my child?

### **Adopters may ask birth parents:**

- Who chose the child's names and why they were given those names?
- Who, in their birth family, the child looks most like?
- What sort of hopes you have for the child?
- What kind of activities/interests would you like the child to be able to do?
- What are your earliest memories of the child?
- Who was there when the child was born?
- What other memories do you have of times you shared with the child, particularly if there are any memorable occasions that were fun?
- Whether there are any belongings that were given to the child by special people in the birth family?
- Who else will the child have known while they were still living in the birth family? This can help the child to make sense of who was who and help them to recall some half remembered events.
- Who are child's birth grandparents – what jobs they have done, what their hobbies and favourite things are, for example their favourite football team, favourite kind of music and so on?
- What has happened to you since the child went to live with them and what plans do they have for the future?
- What you would most like the child to know about you?

For the adopters, trying to understand what has happened to the child may feel a bit like doing a jigsaw and the more that they know about the child they are adopting the easier it will be for them to help the child understand what has happened to them.



## Questions to ask birth parents

We've made suggestions, below, of some questions you might want to ask when meeting your child's birth parents.

**Not all of these questions will be suitable.** For example, it might not be appropriate to ask birth parents about their own lives.

Discuss what you want to know with your social worker before deciding what questions to ask and try to be sensitive to the birth family's situation.

## Pregnancy and birth

- What was the pregnancy like?
- What was the birth like?
- Who held the baby first?
- How much did he/she weigh at birth?

## Babyhood

- When did he/she first talk?
- How did they sleep? Was there something special you did to get them to sleep?
- Did they have a comfort blanket or a favourite soft toy? Did they use a dummy?
- What were his/her first words?
- Who chose his/her name and why?
- What was he/she like as a baby?

## Family life (if appropriate)

- Do they have any particular happy family memories or family holidays they can talk about?
- Do they have any funny stories about him/her?
- Did the child have strong relationships with any extended family members – grandparents, aunts etc?
- Are there any special family traditions, e.g. at Christmas?





# Inheritance

- Do they look like anyone else in the family?
- Where do they get their eyes/nose/hair colouring from?
- If they have a special talent – is this something that runs in the family?
- Are there any special hidden talents in the family?
- Are there any particular jobs/trades that family members have been involved in?
- Are there any inherited illnesses?
- Does anyone in the family have any allergies?

# Birth parents

- How did you meet each other? Do you have any contact now?
- What music do you listen to?
- What do you like doing?
- What are your favourite TV programmes?
- What films do you like?
- What sports teams do you support?
- What is your favourite food?
- What are your hopes for the child?
- How do you feel about the adoption now?
- Is there anything you want the child to know as they grow up?



## Questions to ask your child's adopters

We've made suggestions, below, of some questions you might want to ask when meeting your child's adoptive parents.

**Not all of these questions may be appropriate to your child.** It is important to remember that the adoptive parents may not be able to answer all of your questions if these are inappropriate.

Discuss what you want to know with your Family Connexions worker before deciding what questions to ask, your worker may advise you of questions that the adopters will not be able to answer so that you can think of an alternative.

### Sharing my child's story

- In what ways are you going to keep my child safe and care for them?
- Is there anyone you know or in your family who is adopted?
- How will you explain to my child how and why they are adopted?
- How will you talk about me with my child?

### Family life

- What opportunities will my child have?
- What is your family like?
- Will my child have any brothers or sisters or cousins?
- Do you have any pets?
- What is your neighbourhood or town like?
- What's your typical day or week like?
- What do you do for work?

You may want to consider sharing with your child's adoptive parents your hobbies and interests, what you were like growing up, important people in your family, any hopes and wishes for the child including any religious, cultural choices.

