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**Disruptions to Adoptive Placements**

**Definition**

**For the purpose of this procedure a disruption is defined as adoptive parents indicating to the Agency, after the placement but prior to the making of an Adoption Order, that they do not wish to continue with the placement and are requesting the immediate or a planned removal of the child, or the agency makes a decision to plan to remove the child due to concerns.**

**If a formal decision has been made by the Agency Decision Maker that a child should be matched with adopters and the placement is not made this is formally a ‘breakdown of introductions’ and a decision will need to be made by the Adoption Team Manager as to whether a formal disruption meeting process should be followed or whether the matter should be handled  by way of a professionals meeting and/or a meeting with the adopters.**

Placement planning should be informed by research with particular regard to factors which might influence adoption outcomes. Recent overviews can be found in the following:

*Adoption for looked after children: messages from research edited by Caroline Thomas (BAAF 2013)*

In planning adoption placements, the placing agency should therefore make a risk assessment to consider if there are factors which might make an adoptive placement vulnerable to disruption and consider whether these are risks that can reasonably be managed.

**Legal Context**

* Adoption and Children Act 2002.
* Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011
* National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011

**Principles underlying management of placement disruptions**

* A placement disruption is the responsibility of the whole Corporate Parenting Network.
* Where a disruption occurs the child should be helped to develop a narrative of events which promotes understanding but avoids internalising blame.
* All disruptions in adoptive placements will be subject to the following:
  + An initial planning meeting to be urgently convened to plan the child’s move.
  + A Disruption Meeting (to form the basis of a report) that will take place no later than 40 days following the ending of the placement.
  + A presentation of the report to the Adoption Panel that agreed the match no later than 40 days following the Disruption Meeting, with an executive summary of the lessons learned for sharing within the agency.

**Placement Disruption:**

Disruption can be as a result of a request from the adopters for the placement to come to an end. It is important in this case that a careful assessment is made as to whether this is a ‘cry for help’ or a ‘plea for closure’.  If it is the former, then it is important that efforts are maximised to prevent disruption and a support planning meeting is convened to utilise all available sources of support both within the family network and outside of it.

The decision to move the child will be the responsibility of the case holding team, but be made in consultation with the adoptive family, and the regional adoption agency (Adoption South East).

Wherever possible the child’s wishes and feelings must be ascertained in an age-appropriate manner and considered in reaching a decision about ending a placement.

Decision making must be clearly recorded on the child’s case record.

When it becomes clear that the child needs to be moved, either at the request of the adoptive parents or because of concerns identified by the workers the following needs to be implemented:

* A planning meeting urgently convened comprising the key worker for the child, the adoption support worker and adoptive parents and any relevant Manager who has been closely involved, to plan the move for the child.
* A referral should have been made concurrently by the child’s key worker to the Gateway Team to the effect that a placement is urgently required for the child. (n.b. if at all possible and if deemed appropriate, preference should be given to returning the child to the foster placement where they were prior to moving on to adoption).
* The child’s key worker should work directly with the child in an age-appropriate manner to ensure that the child is clear in respect of the emerging plan and the child should have the opportunity to visit the new placement before the move.
* The key worker (working in partnership with the adoption support worker) should take lead responsibility for the moving arrangements of the child to the new placement (n.b. this includes briefing the foster carers).
* The support worker for the adopters should take responsibility for encouraging the adopters to provide a brief report of the child’s daily routines, likes and dislikes etc. to be passed on to the new carers, and arranging independent support if this is wished for by the adopters.
* The support worker for the adopters should visit the adopters as soon as the move has taken place and should be responsible for maintaining telephone and face-to-face contact in the aftermath of the placement breakdown.
* The child’s social worker should be responsible for informing all other professionals involved with the child of the placement breakdown and for making all necessary arrangements with them e.g. health and education, the IRO and ensuring that the change of placement is recorded on ICS within 24 hours.
* The child’s social worker should take responsibility for informing the birth parents in writing that the child is no longer living with the designated adoptive parents.
* The child’s social worker and adoption support worker should jointly discuss any appropriate contact that could take place post-removal between the child and their former adoptive parents, and the adoption support worker should take the lead in negotiating this.
* In the case of older children, the appointment of an advocate should be considered.

**Looked After Child Review**

***(Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 reg 36 (10)***

A looked after child review must take place no earlier than 28 days and no later than 42 days after the date that the child is returned to the agency.

The looked after review must consider: -

a)     whether the adoption agency remains satisfied that the child should be placed for adoption

b)     the child’s needs welfare and development and whether any changes need to be made to meet his needs or assist his development

c)     the existing arrangements for contact and whether they should continue or be altered

d)     in consultation with the appropriate agencies the arrangements for assessment and meeting the child’s health care and educational needs.

Part of the ongoing looked after review process will involve consideration of the child’s plan. If the child is subject to a placement order and careful assessment concludes that adoption should no longer be the plan – then steps must be taken to rescind the child adoption decision (via a report to the agency decision maker) and to apply to the court for revocation of the placement order.

**The Disruption Meeting**

The purpose of the Disruption Meeting is to reflect on the experience of the placement and the learning arising from it for the child, the carer, and the Corporate Parenting Network as apart from support given by the Adoption Agency, there may be issues in respect of health, education etc. Placement Disruption meetings will be chaired by a manager without line management of the child’s social worker or the adoption service. The meeting will be held within 40 days of the placement coming to an end.   If the timescale is exceeded the meeting is likely to be less effective.

**Convening the meeting**

The adopter’s social worker and their manager will take responsibility for convening the meeting, including issuing invitations, room booking and engaging an independent chair.  They should agree the agenda with the independent chair.

The adopter’s social worker will circulate the minutes including any redacted minutes (if there is third party information that cannot be shared with all) once they have been agreed by the chair.

Participants to the meeting will normally include:

* The Chairperson
* The child’s social worker
* The adoption support worker
* The Adoptive parent/s – they should be invited to attend, or to provide a written contribution if this would be preferable to them.  If attendance at the meeting would be difficult for them, they should be offered a meeting with their social worker and manager or the independent chair in order for their views to be heard and shared. If they wish to bring a support person to the meeting, then decisions will need to be made as to how much of the meeting the supporter can attend, and which aspects are confidential.
* Other actively involved professionals such as teachers (it should be a judgement of the Chair as to whether they should be present for the whole or part of the meeting.  A written contribution may be sufficient).
* A representative of the fostering service if the child had previously been fostered.
* If the child is of an age to participate, they should discuss with their social worker how their views can be heard. If they are to be present, they will need significant preparation. The chair might visit them beforehand, and they will need to know who will be there, the purpose of the meeting, the layout of the room etc.  They may be in attendance for some but not all of the meeting.  Other ways that they can make their views known are via a meeting with the chair, or they could be helped to write a letter or do a drawing.

A carefully placed photograph of the child during the meeting will help participants to keep the child in mind throughout.

***NB:*** The child’s current carer should be invited to submit a written contribution only in respect of the child’s current progress.  If they are unable to respond their supervising worker should be asked to provide this.

As the child would have been placed under Adoption Regulations. It is not likely to be appropriate to invite birth parents in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

The chair should have access in advance to the Childs Permanence Report, the adopters report, matching report, minutes of the panels and placement support plans.as well as a brief summary of events prior to and after the disruption.

**Process of the Meeting - the agenda might include some or all of the following:**

* To consider the child’s life prior to becoming looked after.
* Consideration of any previous placements prior to being matched with the prospective adopters.
* Review the family finding process and the identified placement needs.
* Review the placement plan including any risk assessment and the post placement support plan.
* Identify what aspects of the plan worked and why.
* Identify what aspects of the plan did not work and why.
* Identify what could have been done differently.
* Acknowledge differing points of views and feelings about the disruption.
* Make and record recommendations concerning the strengths and vulnerabilities of (i) the Corporate Parenting Network (ii) the Adoptive Parents (iii) the child.
* Outline implications for future placements for the child
* Outline implications for future placements for the adoptive parents.

**Actions following the Disruption meeting:**

* Minutes of the disruption meeting will be circulated to participants.  However confidential information regarding parties may be redacted from minutes sent to some participants. The foster carers/adopters and children’s names should be either first name or initials only.
* The chair will produce a brief report addressing the sections outlined above. – this will be copied to all parties with confidential information redacted from some copies as appropriate. An executive summary will capture any identified learning points.
* The parties will be enabled to respond in writing to the report and for their contribution to become part of the record of the disruption.
* Disruption report to be considered by the next available Adoption Panel (n.b. the report must be considered by the Adoption Panel within 40 days of the Disruption Meeting taking place) The parties are not in attendance at this panel, but adoption panel have the opportunity to learn from the experiences.
* If any issues arise in respect of the continuing approval of the adopters Adoption Panel must reconsider their position at a subsequent review panel meeting.
* The adoption support worker should discuss with the family, the support that the adopters would benefit from.  Regular and effective communication between the adopters and their adoption worker is vital in order that the adoptive family can be assisted to process and understand the disruption and be helped to manage their feelings associated with this. External counselling or other support may be indicated to assist with this.
* If the adopters are to remain on the Agency resource list, the timing of any further linking discussions should be carefully discussed and assessed between themselves and their adoption worker.

**Learning from disruptions**

Team learning – after an adoption disruption redacted reports can be used within an adoption team learning forum in order that lessons are learnt and included in future practice.

Redacted copies of disruption reports are retained as a team learning resource.

**Notes to be sent to participants of the adoption disruption meeting.**

Convening a disruption meeting is a complex task, it can be daunting for families to attend while struggling with their own feelings about the child, the placement, or the disruption. The family’s contribution, however, is essential as without that all parties will not be able to fully appreciate what has happened and understand it from everyone’s point of view.

Professionals may be reluctant to share their knowledge and opinions and to have their practice discussed but, unless everyone concerned with the placement and the disruption can attend, invaluable information will be lost, thorough preparation and support for all is therefore important.

**Purpose of the meeting**

* To enable participants to share information and feelings about the placement process, the placement made and, if applicable, the disruption.  No blame will be attached, all feelings will be acknowledged.
* To identify issues which had led to difficulties or disruption, they are rarely as a result of a single factor.
* To interpret the current needs of all parties, the child, the adopters, the birth parents, and the agency
* To highlight areas for development in practice

The meeting will take place  ...................an agenda will be sent a week before the meeting.

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