**CONSIDERATION FOR FAMILY TIME (CONTACT) ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN EARLY PERMANENCE PLACEMENTS**

All cases should be assessed on an individual basis, considering the child and circumstances in which they came into care. Where appropriate and achievable, a meeting between the birth parent/s and the carers should occur prior to contact commencing.

**There are some key practical considerations that will need to be managed, including:**

* The **frequency of family time** – in some cases up to five times a week; three times a week appears more usual with contacts lasting between two– three hours.
* **Suitable contact centres and skilled contact supervisors** are needed in order to manage contact safely and sensitively. The carer will bring the child to family time, and the supervisors need to support the handovers between carers and parents, and manage any anxiety or tensions that arise. **It is important to have continuity of contact superviso**r for the child’s sake, but also for the reassurance of the parents and carers.
* Supervisors will need to have some experience of managing the dynamics of contact arrangements and, whilst showing empathy to the birth parents, should be able to maintain a professional view as to how contact is progressing.
* There should be **at least two identified contact supervisors** so that if one is on leave or sick an identifiable contact supervisor is available.
* A **Strengths and Risk Assessment** can be completed before contact arrangements are finalised, to ensure that supervisors are aware, and so that any perceived risks are identified and protective steps taken.
* **Who will be attending family time?** Will the birth family attend together or, if separated, will separate contacts need to be arranged? This may then impact on the child’s routine.
* **Arrangements need to be made in respect of who arrives first and who leaves first** (including carers and the child). What are the arrangements for the handover – will the birth parents be in the contact centre 10 minutes before the child arrives, to ensure that no handover takes place in a public area? Will the birth parents leave first, with a check that they have left before the carers and child leave?
* Issues around the **location of the contact centre** in relation to the distance from the placement need to be considered. Are there any other transport issues, e.g. is there a need for a safety seat/car seat? Is there a contact centre or venue nearer to the birth parents’ home than to the carers’ home, to support the confidentiality of the placement? This should be considered alongside the length of time that the child may be in a car and the risk factors in maintaining confidentiality.
* **Will the parents be able to feed and change the child during family time**? The carers should offer to supply the equipment.
* If the carers are going to enter the contact centre, consideration should be given to their **signing in and not using their last name**.
* There could be a **contact book** so that the carers and parents can record what they did during contact: if a feed took place, if photos were taken, and if gifts were given.
* The **contact supervisor/s will take the contact notes**. How will these be shared? It is important that the matters recorded are consistent from one contact session to another, irrespective of the supervisor. This can be crucial evidence for the court and so an agreed format should be used.
* **How to manage goodbyes** – it can be difficult for birth parents to see the carers giving hugs and kisses to their child.
* **Consideration of use of mobile phones**: whether these are to be used by birth parents, relatives or carers in contact should be considered from the beginning. Discussion is needed about arrangements to provide photos and prevent photos being taken of the carers.
* **Think about gifts from birth parents**: does this need to be limited to small manageable items? If the birth parents buy clothes for the child, do they want them returned if the child has outgrown them?
* **If the parents are not consistent in attending contact**, will arrangements be made for cancelling with the carers and contact supervisors, so that the child is not brought to contact unnecessarily?
* Carers should be given advice on how to claim **travel expenses** (likely to be addressed in placement planning meeting).
* Carers and birth parents should be made aware of the use of social media and the implications this may have in any care proceedings.