SIBLING ASSESSMENT REPORT

GUIDANCE NOTES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Checklist for the Sibling Assessment Report

The Sibling Assessment Report includes the following paperwork: Tick to indicate which appendices have been completed and are included within the report.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sibling Assessment Report | 1. Full details of each child in the sibling group and their current placement 2. Details of social worker qualifications and experience 3. Work undertaken to complete the report 4. Key background information and impact on children’s sibling relationship 5. The views of parents and significant relatives about each child and their sibling relationship 6. Key observations of the children and their sibling relationship 7. Findings from SDQ and any possible future implications 8. Overview of each child and their Individual needs 9. Overview of sibling relationships 10. Support or interventions provided re: the sibling relationship 11. Consideration of realistic placement options 12. Analysis and recommendation re: placement 13. Consideration of and recommendations for contact 14. Recommendations for future support 15. Signatures |  |
| Questionnaires used to inform report | 1. Parents and relatives – views about the children and their sibling relationships 2. Parents and relatives – exploring roles and any differential treatment 3. Foster carers – overview for each child 4. Foster carers – observations of sibling relationships – positive and negative aspects 5. Foster carers – identifying difficult patterns of behaviour and aggression 6. Foster carers – observations of contact between separated siblings 7. Contact supervisor – observations of contact: interactions during family contact with parents and between siblings 8. Health staff – observations of child 9. Pre-school education staff – observations of child 10. School education staff – observations of child | Required  Required  Required  Required  Required as appropriate  Required as appropriate  Required  Required  Required as appropriate |
| SDQ reports used to inform report | The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires are copyrighted documents that may not be modified in any way. Paper versions may be downloaded and subsequently photocopied from the following website without charge for non-commercial purposes. | Required as appropriate/ available |

Completing the form

CoramBAAF Form SAR (2021) Sibling Assessment Report is only available as an electronic template through a licence agreement.

The forms for collecting the views of the birth parents, professionals and the child can be purchased and downloaded from the CoramBAAF website – <https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/sibling-guide-forms> and should be placed on the child’s file. The key points from the information gathered can besummarisedfor the report with the documents in full set out as appendices. Further details of these are included in Appendix B.

The SDQ is part of the DAWBA family of mental health measures. SDQ forms are available to be downloaded free from the website – <https://www.sdqinfo.com/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(UK)>

Genogram. The template for the genogram in the care application can be included with the assessment report if it is not otherwise included in accompanying paperwork, e.g. in a court bundle.Notes for guidance

The Sibling Assessment Report (SAR) provides a template for workers to bring together the information they have gathered about the individual needs of each child in the sibling group; to explore the positives and challenges of the sibling relationship; to provide analysis of what this information means when making a decision about placement of the siblings together or separately; and to identify the future support needs, taking into account the recommendation of whether they will be placed with some or all of their brothers and sisters.

**Requirements of legislation**

Children Act legislation and guidance (CPPR 3.21–3.24) recognises that ‘wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together’, and that ‘being able to live with brothers and sisters where they are also looked after is an important protective factor for many looked after children’. It also recognises that ‘there will be some circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together and children should be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings’, and highlights the availability of ‘good practice guidance on assessing the placement of siblings together, the importance of assessing relationship quality with sibling groups and how to promote and maintain sibling contact’.

Following a Department for Education (DfE) consultation on the placement of siblings in 2013, the Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a new requirement on local authorities,[[1]](#footnote-1) namely that where the adoption agency is considering adoption for two or more siblings, it must consider whether to identify prospective adopters who may be suitable to adopt two or more of the siblings together, having regard to the best interests of each sibling. **AAR** **Reg 12A(2).**

Further guidance is set out in Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013, which states that ‘Siblings should be adopted by the same prospective adopter unless there is good reason why they should not be’, and that ‘Where an agency is making a placement decision on two or more children from the same family, it should be based on a comprehensive assessment of the quality of the children’s relationship, their individual needs and the likely capacity of the prospective adopter to meet the needs of all the siblings being placed together’. **DfE Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013**,and in the draft guidance prepared following the Children and Families Act 2014, which gives a clear steer on what was expected of local authorities.

*There should be a clear decision-making process which enables social workers to decide early whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision-making process should be set out clearly with the supporting information and evidence so that all the professionals who are involved in making decisions about each child’s future can see how and why the decision was reached. It will also be important in future for the child, as an adult, to be able to see how and why a decision was reached. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child. Agencies may wish to have a formal assessment process in place to assist with the analysis and decision making*. **Adoption Statutory Guidance – 2014 (unpublished)**

**Good Practice Guide (GPG) *Beyond Together or Apart* [[2]](#footnote-2)**

Butcher and Upright[[3]](#footnote-3) (2018) highlighted the challenges described by social workers when making decisions about whether to place children in permanent placements with their siblings, alongside making plans to help children maintain those sibling relationships where separate placements are required to meet their individual needs: ‘I feel intimidated by them [the sibling assessment]. It is such an important decision I almost felt under qualified to do it. It wasn’t covered at university and I thought we would have some actual training, an example of a good one, how you go about gathering the information, but I haven’t.’

***Beyond Together or Apart*** was first published by CoramBAAF in 2018, and the new edition in 2021. The book explores relevant research on sibling relationships to help inform social workers’ assessments, and places a strong emphasis on multi-sourcing information and corroborating evidence wherever possible. It highlights the importance of completing an assessment of each sibling’s individual needs as well as those of the sibling group, and the importance of a collaborative approach between families, social workers and foster carers working together and with others to gather the information required to understand and be able to then meet the children’s needs. Information from the GPG has been used to inform this guidance, but we would strongly recommend workers referring back to the book to explore and understand the concepts and research in more detail. In particular, Chapter 2 considers factors that help or hinder children’s sibling relationships; Chapter 5 focuses on assessment; whilst Chapter 6 includes material on involving children in the assessment.

**The development and use of the Sibling Assessment Report (SAR)**

The SAR is an important tool to enable the adoption agency to plan for brothers and sisters and ensure that their individual and collective needs will be met in the short and longer term. It has been designed so that it links to the model set out in *Beyond Together or Apart*, which is described in this accompanying guidance, alongside the tools created to gather the required information to support sibling assessments. These tools have replaced the previous *Together or Apart* checklists, which should no longer be used.

The form has been piloted by seven local authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies: Adopt Thames Valley, Brighton and Hove, Cornwall, Essex, Lincolnshire, Medway, and One Adoption West Yorkshire. The pilot started in February 2020 and was extended to the end of the year due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. We are grateful to all those involved who provided feedback to assist in the development of the template.

When writing this assessment report, it is important to remember that there will be different purposes and potential audiences for the report. It may be prepared before or during care proceedings to inform care planning about immediate or longer term placement, to inform therapeutic work with the siblings, or to consider a change of care plan where placement together has not been achieved or where a potential disruption of placement has been identified. It may be read by social workers and their managers involved in the decision making for siblings, adoption panel members and the agency decision-maker, those involved in court proceedings – CAFCASS guardians, magistrates and judges, prospective adopters or permanent carers and therapists.

As Beckett (2018) noted, ‘Even if it seems clear that the brothers and sisters should remain together, a detailed assessment will provide essential information for a new family and will enable the agency to anticipate the extra help and support that may be necessary’.

The report will draw upon the views and observations of a number of different people contributing their experience, understanding and knowledge of the children, their circumstances and their relationship so the social worker can provide analysis of the information and how this has led to their recommendations and conclusions.

GUIDANCE NOTES – these refer to the superscript letters in brackets in the form

1. **Child’s details**. Give full names, ages and dates of birth for all the siblings being considered in this assessment report, setting out their sibling relationship: e.g. full siblings, maternal/paternal half-siblings, step-siblings or other relationships, such as foster siblings.
2. **Gender**. Where the child is old enough, it may also be appropriate to discuss issues of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation and trans status. For more information, see the CoramBAAF Practice Note 70, *Working with Trans Young People in Foster Care.*
3. **Ethnicity**. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) sets out that ‘The terminology used to describe ethnic groups has changed markedly over time and however defined or measured, tends to evolve in the context of social and political attitudes or developments. Ethnic group is also very diverse, encompassing common ancestry and elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance.’ It recommends that people should be invited to select, from a list of categories, the ethnic group to which they consider they belong. These categories are also now used by Ofsted and so will be familiar to social workers. The groups are set out below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A White** | | | |
| English/Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/British | Irish | Gypsy or Irish Traveller | Any other White background, please describe |
| **B Mixed/MULTIPLE ETHNIC GROUPS** | | | |
| White and Black Caribbean | White and Black African | White and Asian | Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background |
| **C Asian/ASIAN BRITISH** | | | |
| Indian | Pakistani | Bangladeshi | Chinese |
| **D Black/AFRICAN/CARIBBEAN/BLACK BRITISH** | | | |
| African | Caribbean | Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe | |
| **E OTHER ETHNIC GROUP** | | | |
| Arab | | Any other ethnic group, please describe | |

If these groups do not reflect the way in which the child or their family members identify themselves, use their own preferred way of doing this.

1. **Qualifications**. The worker writing the report should set out their professional qualifications and length of experience of working in child care social work, therapeutic or other related settings, and the period of time they have known and been involved in working with the children and/or their family.
2. Work undertaken to complete this report. Provide details, including dates, of all interviews with key individuals, any observation sessions or direct work completed with some or all of the siblings, naming the children involved, the key reports and correspondence read, e.g. psychological, paediatric, or educational assessments, Child Permanence Reports or other court reports, and the questionnaires and tools completed by the range of people who know or have known the children in different settings.
3. Key background information and impact on children’s sibling relationship. Whilst there will be other reports that will contain detailed information about the circumstances that led to the child coming into care, the SAR needs to be able to be read as a stand-alone document. In this section, provide a summary of what led to the children coming into care, highlighting what were the supportive factors and relationships in the children’s lives as well as the adversities experienced, and then set out what is known about how life at home impacted on each child and also on their sibling relationship.

If the worker writing the report worked with the children prior to them entering care, they may have direct knowledge of the home conditions they grew up in and the relationships they had with their parents/caregivers and each other. Where this is not the case, access case records, CP conference minutes, parenting assessments, and discuss with others, and/or use the questionnaires to gather the information from those who knew the children at the time.

There may be older or adult siblings in the sibling network who may not be part of the sibling assessment but may have had a significant role with some or all of the younger children, and their observations are also likely to be important and significant.

1. Each child’s experience of being parented, to include both shared and any separate experiences.

Set out if the children have always lived together, and where there have been periods of separation from some or all of their siblings, then set out who they lived with and the dates of all periods of separation, with details of the quality of care they received from their caregiver and how their relationship with their siblings was maintained during any periods of separation. This information may not be fully recorded on the case records and so these details may need to be obtained from discussions or use of the questionnaires with birth parents and other family members.

1. Beckett (p57) suggests that local authorities develop their chronology templates to include a focus on sibling relationships, unless this is already established practice, so that details about siblings are recorded and highlighted. Chronologies can provide an overview of the children’s experiences that can help workers trace, consider and review significant events such as the impact of the birth of a new child on existing children in the family, give clarity about any episodes a child has spent apart from their siblings, and record and highlight key points in respect of the care that each of the siblings has received as well as any periods when children have lived apart. For example, understanding the reasons why one child may have remained with their mother whilst others were cared for by grandparents may provide important clues about maternal preferential treatment, or explain that separation may have occurred for other reasons. Chronologies can also be useful in helping to draw up a list of who might be contacted to seek their views.
2. The views of parents and significant relatives about each child and their sibling relationship.

Parenting assessments should already include information about siblings, so before meeting with parents, review these reports and consider what can be usefully summarised to include in the sibling assessment. In particular, look for information about the different roles the children may have had in the family and any differential treatment and/or differential affection they were subject to and how that impacted on their relationships.

Talking to parents and other significant relatives, particularly those who may have cared for some or all of the children at different times, and using the questionnaires will help add to what is already known when the focus of the discussion is on each of the children individually as well as their sibling relationships. Parents and significant relatives often have additional insights about how relationships developed between brothers and sisters. If there are difficulties in engaging parents to discuss these aspects with the child’s social worker, consider whether there is another professional with whom they may be willing to work, e.g. a contact supervisor or support worker.

1. Key observations of the children and their sibling relationship from all relevant professionals.   
   In this section, record the key information obtained from a range of people who have been involved with the children. The questionnaires included with the SAR package can be used to help gather this information. For each person who has provided information, set out the context and length of their involvement and whether they have known the children prior to them coming into care. It is also helpful to note in relation to foster carers what experience they have had of caring for brothers and sisters previously.

Foster carers receive and “hold” a huge amount of rich information about children and typically, when caring for some or all of the child’s siblings, they will have a great deal to contribute to assessments.

If the child/ren have spent time in a previous foster placement, then it is helpful to seek the views of those carers as to the children’s needs and relationships and to understand what worked well and what might have been more difficult for carers to manage. NB. Some children may be in other arrangements, e.g. cared for by family and friends carers, a residential setting or with prospective adopters, so the forms can be adapted as required for these situations.

**Contact supervisors**.The mainfocus and expectation of contact supervisors may be to observe interactions between parents and children as part of the assessments being completed for the court process. However, where this contact also includes children in a sibling group, the staff undertaking contact supervision need to be briefed on what aspects are especially important to observe and record in respect of interactions between siblings and their behaviour during each session – both positive and negative. The behaviour patterns that are observed during contact, such as how each child was treated within the family or any differential treatment and/or differential affection shown by parents or wider family, can provide important pointers and examples of behaviour that may be used as supporting evidence in sibling assessments.

**Health visitor and/ or other health professionals**. Health professionals often have considerable experience and knowledge of children’s early experiences within the family home and important information about how siblings were treated by their parents. Obtaining this can help you identify and evidence some patterns of interaction and how these might have begun, for example, perhaps the children’s father was observed to favour boys in the family whilst daughters were treated less well. Health visitor records can also provide a rich source of information about how children were treated and how they progressed.

**Education staff – nursery or school settings**. Education staff in nursery, pre-school or school settings also have important knowledge about the children’s sibling relationships but may not be routinely asked to contribute to sibling assessments. Understanding each child’s behaviour and presentation in different settings is an important component of the assessment, e.g. a child may show aggressive behaviour towards siblings and may or may not show similar behaviour towards peers at school. Staff in playgroups and other pre-school settings are likely to have a detailed knowledge of the child as well as how they relate to other children, similarly for teaching staff working with any school-aged children.

1. Where an SDQ**[[4]](#footnote-4)** has been completed, set out any significant findings about the child’s individual needs and behaviours.

Where available, the SDQ can be a helpful tool to contribute to understanding of the children and their needs. Using the information gathered from the SDQs completed for each of the siblings, comment here on how any of the issues raised has had an impact on the sibling relationships and what possible future implications there might be for support or placement.

NB. Although completion of the SDQ is only required by the DfE for children aged 4–16 who have been continuously looked after for a year, Beckett advises that foster carers could be asked to complete an SDQ for children aged two years and above and that foster carers and pre-school staff should be asked to complete the appropriate SDQ for children aged three and above. The impact supplement of the SDQ also generates helpful information about what it is like for the carer looking after the child, as well as thinking about the child’s own awareness of the difficulties that may distress them. Beckett notes that, in general, SDQs completed by teachers are better at picking up on conduct problems; parents/carers are better at noting emotional symptoms, and whilst SDQs are good at detecting conduct, hyperactivity, depressive and some anxiety disorders, they are poor at detecting specific phobias, separation anxiety and eating disorders.

1. Overview of each child and their individual needs.

When assessing the relationships between siblings, particularly where this will be used to make plans about their placement together or apart, it is crucial to conduct a full assessment of each child in a sibling group as well as an assessment of their relationships with one another. This is also key information for any potential long-term carer.

Beckett (p61) highlights the importance of each child in a sibling group having the opportunity for some individual sessions in which they can explore and reflect on their life at home, the reasons why they are in care, and what they would wish for in the future. Disabled children may need extra help to be able to communicate their wishes, feelings and views.

Use the information that has been gathered from all sources as well as your own observations to set out each child’s needs, considering the following areas: identity, developmental, emotional, behavioural, social, health, and education, recognising where there are differences in behaviour observed in different settings or by different people.

1. Overview of sibling relationships.

In this section, highlight from your own observations and those of others who have contributed to the assessment how each of the children get on with each other and, where there are more than two siblings, how they get on as a sibling group together. Note any roles that they have within the group, the strengths and vulnerabilities of their relationships, and how all of this impacts on each child.

Assessments of two or more children will benefit from opportunities to see children in a sibling group in different groupings and all together. Observing children at different times of the day and in different settings is also important, e.g. if the eldest child is at school, visit to allow time with pre-school siblings and then observe them all being reunited at the end of the school day. Consider using opportunities when they are not aware of you or focused on you, e.g. observing them in outdoor play together from an indoor window or remotely through use of a video link.

1. Support or interventions used to address any difficulties identified within the sibling relationship?

Set out in this section any reparative work and support that has been offered to the foster carers and children, what impact this work has had, and whether there is any outstanding work that has been identified.Behaviour patterns of concern need to be addressed when the children are placed in foster care, whether they are placed together or separately. When siblings are placed in separate foster homes, contact, including overnight visits, may allow crucial opportunities for reparative work with brothers and sisters. Interventions sourced through consultations with local CAMHS workers or more specialist services have been shown to help carers to become effective mediators and so minimise or prevent difficulties in relationships.

1. Each child’s views about their brothers and sisters, whether expressed directly or as indicated by their behaviour towards one another.

Where possible, it is important that the assessment includes the views of the children about whom a decision is being made. Where the child is not able or willing to share their views, you can also describe their actions and behaviours, which provide indicators to their views.

Beckett (2018) notes that reports tend to collect information *about* children rather than *from* children. Direct work with children will help to make the assessment more balanced, but children should not be given the responsibility of deciding which brothers or sisters they might want to be placed with; rather they should be helped to express their feelings, exploring how much they identify with each of their siblings, who they like to play/spend time with, and their thoughts about their family relationships. For example, a child may express resentment and anger towards a sibling who has been favoured by parents, or may show delight upon seeing an older sibling return from school. Direct work with children should take account of the child’s individual needs and circumstances, e.g. their background, age and understanding, as well as any special or additional needs arising from ethnicity, language, disability and/or preferred means of communication. Chapter 6 of *Beyond Together or Apart* details how to engage in this work and contains a range of resources.

1. Consideration of realistic placement options.

In this section, identify the different placement options available and the benefits and losses that would be associated with each option for each child. A Decision-Making Template (Butcher and Upright, 2018) could be used: some local authorities may have their own version approved by their legal teams or this information could be set out as text.

See *Beyond Together or Apart*, Chapter 5, pp71–73 for guidance on assessing whether siblings should be placed separately, and considering permanence options.

The benefits of different placement options and combinations require a careful balancing exercise, and this is likely to be especially challenging in respect of sibling groups where children have intense and divergent parenting needs, where the age span is greater, and when older children may have significant, complex relationships with some birth relatives. The extent to which contact is actively considered and supported within the range of permanency options is also likely to influence what placement options are perceived as viable within each authority.

**Decision-Making Template**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **First realistic option:** | |
| **Factors in favour** | **Factors against** |
|  |  |
| **Second realistic option:** | |
| **Factors in favour** | **Factors against** |
|  |  |
| **Third realistic option:** | |
| **Factors in favour** | **Factors against** |
|  |  |

1. Analysis and recommendations re: placement.

In this section, set out your analysis and the key considerations that have led to your recommendation for the future placement of the siblings, including any relevant research that has influenced your analysis and decision. If there is any significant disagreement about the plan from the children’s parents, family members (including older siblings) foster carers, or other professionals, set out how their views have been taken into account.

1. Consideration of and recommendations of contact.

In this section, set out the possible options for contact, including the purpose, benefits and risks of each option and what support would be needed for each of the siblings and their carers, with the recommendations that are being made for future sibling contact and how this will be supported and reviewed so it continues to meet the needs of all the children in the sibling group.

Adoption Statutory Guidance (2013) sets out that: ‘Where it is not possible for the siblings to be placed together, the agency should consider carefully the need for the children to remain in contact with each other and the need for adoption support.’

There is useful information and research pointers in *Beyond Together or Apart*, Chapter 9. The Research in Practice website based on the research findings of Professor Beth Neil[[5]](#footnote-5) also supports social workers who are planning contact for siblings – <https://contact.rip.org.uk/topics/contact-with-siblings/>. Neil *et al* (2015) have also set out a practice model for planning and supporting contact at [www.uea.ac.uk/contact-after-adoption/resources](http://www.uea.ac.uk/contact-after-adoption/resources) as well as a helpful guide to practitioners.

1. Recommendations for future support.

Support for siblings and their relationships is likely to be ongoing regardless of whether the siblings are being placed together or separately, so in this section, set out what work is being proposed to support the children’s relationships now and in the future and what support may be needed by the carers or adoptive parents of each of the siblings to facilitate this.

Beckett (p33) highlights the value of reparative care to help children to become both more emotionally regulated and better able to understand and manage relationships with siblings and peers. A focus on improving the sibling relationships should have wider positive benefits for children, and in particular will be likely to promote peer relationships. These relationships are also likely to be important in respect of the children’s later adult lives.

Appendix A

Contents of ***Beyond Together or Apart: Planning for, assessing and placing sibling groups*, Shelagh Beckett, 2021**

1. **Introduction**

Includes the Sibling Charter and core values and principles

1. **Children’s sibling relationships: what helps or hinders them?**

Includes children’s relationships with their brothers and sisters, the impact of early family life, parenting, emotional warmth and differential treatment, adverse childhood experiences and sibling relationships, the impact of domestic violence, fear and uncertainty, bullying and peer and sibling relationships, caregiving behaviours, disability, links between friendships and sibling relationships, and research on improving sibling relationships.

1. **Becoming looked after: early planning, placement and contact for brothers and sisters**

Includes what matters to children and young people, research on placement together in foster care, early planning and placing children, foster families intervening to help promote better peer and sibling relationships, foster carers and separated siblings – placement and contact issues, working with the children – photos, explanations and visits, the quality of contact – observations and links to assessment.

1. **Frameworks for the assessment of sibling relationships and placements**
2. **Assessment: what you should include and why**

Includes key elements and rationale for assessment, structuring and managing the process – what a coherent assessment might include, understanding needs and behaviours – incorporating SDQs into your assessment, discussion and practice points, analysis, circumstances that may indicate that siblings should be placed separately, identifying who should be placed with whom and considering permanence options, making decisions, recording – the importance of clear written explanations for children and their families.

1. **Involving children, providing explanations and doing life story work**
2. **Recruiting and preparing new families**

Includes recruiting permanent new families, preparing, assessing and approving families, key aspects to explore and address in adoption assessments, the impact on existing children, support within the adopters’ network and beyond, training, preparation and the adoption panel.

1. **Preparing to move, matching and introductions**

Includes sharing information, Introductions – paying attention to children’s and adults’ emotional needs, adopters and foster carers – their relationship and needs, planning moves, moving in all together or not?, children in separate placements and where continued placement apart is planned, children currently placed together who are to go to separate permanent families.

1. **Brothers and sisters: visits and keeping in touch**

Includes planning and supporting contact, planning contact – pointers from research, contact between adopted children and siblings in long-term foster care/with family members, is there too much focus on risk and not enough on benefits?, specialist organisations helping siblings to meet up.

1. **Research: how children and their families fare**

Includes overview of children’s family backgrounds, their pre-placement experiences and needs, introductions and the early days, the “care-giver” child, children’s sibling and peer relationships, aggression, emotional regulation and sibling conflicts.

1. **Planning the right support for children and families**

Includes helping birth children and placed children to get along, research on post-placement support, Adoption Support Fund, planning support.

**Appendix B**

**Using the questionnaires**

Questionnaires from professionals are likely to be completed and returned by post or electronically, but some contributions, e.g. those from the birth parents or family members or from the children’s foster carers, are designed for the worker to use with them to encourage their memories and reflections on the children’s experiences. Forms for foster carers can also be used by other current carers, e.g. family and friends carers or residential staff.

1. **Parents’ and relatives – views about the children and their sibling relationships**

This questionnaire provides some key “starter” questions to help parents share their insights about each child, from birth through the arrival of other siblings, and starts to tease out the parent’s views of each child. You can build on the trigger questions until you have an initial overview for each child born into the family.

1. **Parents and relatives – exploring roles and any differential treatment**

This questionnaire helps you to explore with parents and other significant relatives the roles and expectations of the children within the family setting, including gender differences, and to identify any differential treatment of some or all of the children.

1. **Foster carers/current carers – overview for each child**

Foster carers receive and “hold” a huge amount of rich information about children and typically, when caring for some or all of the child’s siblings, they will have a great deal to contribute to assessments. This form allows the carer to focus on each child’s individual needs.

1. **Foster carers/current carers – observations of sibling relationships – positive and negative aspects**

This questionnaire has been developed so that carers can complete it over a period of time – a fortnight is suggested. It provides an opportunity for carers to note the interactions between the children as they arise on a daily basis. There is space for noting both positive and negative aspects of behaviour observed between the children, e.g. in what ways do the children have fun and enjoy playing together? Is aggression between the siblings a source of worry? If so, what form does this take and how often does it occur? If the child/ren have spent time in a previous foster placement, then it would be helpful to go back to those carers to seek their views as to the children’s needs and relationships, and to understand what worked well in that foster placement and what might have been more difficult for carers to manage.

The carers should ideally have this form sent by secure means electronically so that they can use it flexibly, allowing as much space as needed under each of the headings.

They may observe occasional disputes between siblings that they consider to be within normal parameters, but where they are concerned by or reporting a high and sustained pattern of conflict between siblings, this will benefit from greater detail being sought by also using questionnaire 5. (Physical aggression that is instigated by one child towards other siblings is linked with more difficulties and breakdowns in adoption, and research on child development identifies parental differential treatment as being associated with greater conflict among siblings and, for the less favoured child, poorer adjustment.)

1. **Foster carers – identifying difficult patterns of behaviour and aggression**

This questionnaire can be shared with carers where there are identified concerns about difﬁcult behaviours, conflicts or lack of co-operation between siblings so that these behaviours can be explored in more detail. Where difficult behaviours are being reported, it is helpful to identify if they are also being seen in other settings, such as nursery or school.

1. **Foster carers – observations of contact between separated siblings**

If the child/ren are having contact with any siblings placed separately, this questionnaire can be used by the carers to note the child’s responses before and after time spent with them and, where the carer is present during the contact, to comment on their interactions with their siblings.

1. **Contact supervisor – observations of contact: interactions during family contact with parents and between siblings**

Contact reports and records may provide evidence needed for the sibling assessment but where this is not available or not easily accessible, this questionnaire helps the social worker gather relevant information from the contact supervisor on the behaviours, relationships and interactions observed.

1. **Health staff – observations of child**

This questionnaire can be used to ask for a health professional’s observations of the relationships between the parents and children and the positive and negative behaviours between the children.

1. **Pre-school education staff – observations of child**

See notes below.

1. **School education staff – observations of child**

Beckett has highlighted that if a child has established coercive behaviours towards their siblings, we should not be surprised to see these patterns “spill over” into other relationships, such as with their peers in education settings, and that sibling bullying significantly increases the risk of being involved in peer bullying. The information provided by questionnaires 9 and 10 from pre-school/ nursery workers or education workers should be included in the assessment report alongside any SDQ analysis based on SDQs completed by teachers.

1. The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014, which amended the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shelagh Beckett (2021), *Beyond Together or Apart: Planning for, assessing and placing sibling groups*, London: CoramBAAF [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Think Siblings Project Coram Cambridgeshire 2018 – <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/think-siblings-project-final-report> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Local authorities have been required to use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) since 2008/9 to collect information about children’s emotional and behavioural health. The forms can be downloaded from <https://www.sdqinfo.com/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(UK)> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Contact after Adoption*, Beth Neil, Mary Beek and Emma Ward, 2015, published by CoramBAAF [↑](#footnote-ref-5)