

# **Good practice in supporting a fostered child's transition to their new adoptive family**

**FULL POLICY**

**Devon County Council**

**Adoption Services**

**Fostering Services**

**November 2015**

## Good practice in supporting a fostered child's transition to their new adoptive family

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## **The Context: What we know from research**

The population of children in care in England is at a 30-year high, the latest official government statistics have revealed.

A total of 69,540 children were in care at the end of March 2015. Figures published in October 2015 by the Department for Education state that the number of looked-after children is now higher than at any point since 1985.

Whilst there has been a drop in adoption figures, other forms of permanent placements are on the increase, including special guardianship placements.

Despite an increased focus on Foster to Adopt placements, in the UK, currently 85% of adoption placements are to 'strangers'.

Recent research has found that there is an association between poorly managed transitions and later disruptions to the adoption, a situation where a child is returned to the placing agency, either pre or post adoption order.

The proportion of adoptions that disrupt post-order lies between 2%-9%, while the overall rate is 3.2% (Selwyn, 2014). It is clear that difficulties in an adoptive family can result in a number of challenging adopted-child behaviours, and the potential need for psychological services, respite and/or alternative foster care arrangements, at considerable cost to Local Authorities.

Ultimately, some adopted children, who have experienced disruption, may move into adulthood with significant behavioural issues, ones that could mean further need for statutory services, and potential cycles of harm to continue.

Given these statistics, and given that the rate of permanent placements is likely to continue to increase, due thought, planning, and a child-centred approach is critical if the transition process is to be managed well, and works to the psychological benefit of children and their adoptive families, rather than a cost, emotionally and financially.

The same guiding principles as laid out in this policy also need to be applied to all other moves for children in our care, including transitions to other forms of permanent care, such as permanent foster care and Special Guardianship Orders.

## **You, us and the child.**

### **How, together, we're going to make this work**

This guidance has been written within the context of previous research, with the aim, and the hope, of bringing about positive and lifelong change for children who are placed for adoption.

Critical to this guidance, is a mind-shift by all those concerned with a child's transition from foster care to adoption. Work to ensure a stable adoptive placement for a child, does not end when they are placed with prospective adopters, but conscientiously supports them at least, and ideally beyond, the point of their adoptive parents being granted an Adoption Order.

It is our belief that we can prevent adoption disruptions because we are now better prepared and more able to understand this extremely delicate transition for children. What we know is that children who are accommodated by the Local Authority, almost always come into care from traumatic and abusive environments. Because of their early childhood experiences, they are unlikely to demonstrate secure attachment behaviours to their birth parents.

Our foster placements provide these children with, wherever possible, secure, safe, warm and loving home environments. As such, our hope is that they will begin to show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviour to their foster carers.

With evolving research and knowledge as our base, this guidance aims to ensure that the warmth, love and security that the majority of these children will have internalised, is held as strongly as possible through the sometimes traumatic transition into their adoptive family.

In writing this guidance, all professionals involved understand the enormous commitment and dedication it will take for everyone, Social workers, foster carers, adopters and managers, to make the transition to a child's new family as positive as possible,

However, we must all ensure that throughout the transition process, we hold in our minds that the child remains at the centre of our practice.

It is this that will ensure our some of the most vulnerable children within our society achieve and enjoy the best possible outcome in their new adoptive family.

The number of Foster to Adopt placements is also on the increase; many of these placements are made in emergency situations and so transition periods are not always possible. However, in cases where there is more time, the transitions principles should be adhered to as closely as possible, in order to deliver similarly improved outcomes for the children involved.

## The experience of moving to an adoptive placement

Imagine moving away from **all** of our life, including our family, job, friends, pets and possessions **all in one go**, as an adult, and how frightening and distressing that would be.

Now, if we were to imagine a small child, one who has likely experienced much trauma, having to undergo such a move, again (having already been removed from their birth family); we may then have some sense of the potential trauma a move to an adoptive family is likely to be...

With that in mind, moving from foster care to an adoptive family may be a traumatic experience for a child who may show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers.

Additionally, children may have a range of emotions from their past evoked by the words 'mummy' and 'daddy', and such feelings will be registering in a child's brain at different levels.

The child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions.

However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Furthermore, concepts of 'permanence' and the 'future' are beyond the comprehension of children under the age of five, who have no real understanding of time. However, we know how child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move.

Recent research backs up what we in the Adoption and Fostering teams know: it is critical that adoption planning is carried out attuned to, and with acceptance of, the individual child's needs.

In order for a child to undertake their move to a new adoptive family, they need to feel safe and to develop a feeling of trust towards the adopter(s), and research evidences that this feeling of safety is the key to the whole process of transitions (*Van der Kolk, 2004, Henry, 2005*).

The Devon County Council Fostering and Adoption Teams utilise an approach advocated by the Family Place and Family Futures, that combines elements based on Theraplay (*Jernberg, 1979*), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (Hughes, 2006) and Neurosequentialism (*Perry, 2006*).

## **Key stages of adoption – seven stages in brief**

**The underlying concept behind the transitions period, is that its aim is to promote the adopters' bond to the child, and the child's attachment to their new adoptive family**

**The transitions period has a number of important elements and purposes broken down below into key stages:**

- **Stage one:**  
The process of the adopters being trained (specifically in attachment in relation to transitions) assessed and approved.
- **Stage two:**  
The decision for the child to be adopted is made.
- **Stage three:**  
The adopters being matched to the child and finding out about him/her, (with a number of statutory processes). The importance of the adoptive family becoming familiar with the routines of the child, their likes and dislikes, their coping strategies etc.
- **Stage four:**  
Continuing the child's living story/history. Life story work that began when they entered care is enhanced and expanded with a Welcome to my (adoptive) Family Book, and further information explaining the move to their new adoptive family.
- **Stage five:**  
The child (hopefully showing evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers) being introduced to, and (hopefully) beginning to develop additional secure attachment behaviours towards their adoptive parent(s).

Essential considerations are supporting the child developing a sense of safety and trust with their adoptive parents, and their foster carers giving them permission to move on.

- **Stage six:**

The period following transitions is important for continuing to support the child in building a sense of safety and security.

The focus is on spending quiet, low-key time as a family unit, developing family routines and ensuring that the child continues to gain awareness of who their new family is and vice versa.

There is a difference between routines that need to carry on from the foster carers, at least for a short while, such as meal times etc. and then there are the social patterns, which adopters need to change at first – they need to have time and space to ‘nest’ with their child.

- **Stage seven:**

Moving on, whilst maintaining contact with his/her significant carers. Foster carers saying, “See you soon” to the child.

This stage includes plans for the maintenance of contact with their former primary carers with whom the child demonstrates as having a secure attachment.

## **Stage one: The process of the adopters being trained, assessed and approved**

A two-stage assessment process concludes, for those successful, with approval by the Local Authority's Decision-Maker, after recommendation by the adoption panel.

Key consideration in this process is how potential adopters might be encouraged and supported to meet any particular needs of children, and for them to think about their expectations of adoption, and the consequences for them, and their family, of caring for an adopted child who may have a range of complex needs.

For the Adoption and Fostering Services, an area to be very clear about, is that a child that is adopted, no matter how 'perfect' their adoptive family are, will not easily adapt to a very new environment; one that is fundamentally strange to them.

In fact, if a child seems 'fine' during and after the process, we would ask how that could be, when we would naturally expect the child to experience a period of grief and loss?!

Furthermore we would hope that adopters, and all social workers, are primed to help children to cope with their distress, by acknowledging and containing it, rather than avoiding, or minimising it.

The child will likely be displaying secure attachment behaviours towards their foster carers (and may even think of them as 'mummy' and/or 'daddy', whether or not they are able to vocalise this).

Therefore, and critically, the work done in the transition from foster placement to adoptive placement must ensure that child has no experience of being 'taken away' from their primary attachment figures.

Critical in the training of adopters is ensuring they understand basic attachment theory, understand the transition process and why it's important, and have the stability and resilience to put it into practice, for the benefit of any child that eventually becomes part of their family.



**Stage two: The decision for the child to be adopted is made**

A Local Authority will need to consider a child's needs for permanence when that child is about to be relinquished for adoption, or is looked after, either because the child is being voluntarily accommodated, is the subject of an Interim Care Order, or care proceedings have been initiated.

While there are rare cases where a birth parent may consent to their child being placed for adoption, more generally the Local Authority is required to request a Placement Order from the courts, in order to dispense with the parental responsibility of the birth parents' and place the child with a new adoptive family.

Prospective adopters will acquire Parental Responsibility for the child as soon as the child is placed with them, to be shared with the birth parents and the adoption agency making the placement.

When an Adoption Order is granted, some months after a child is placed into an adoptive family, parental responsibility passes completely to the adopters, and is no longer shared.

At this stage, it is vital that life story work with the child has been carried out, focused on three key areas: the role of a 'looking after' family; why their birth family cannot care for them; and different family structures.

Life story work is led by the child's social worker and supported by the foster carer(s). The supervising social worker and life story book worker, from the adoption team, also support this process.

## **Stage three: The adopters being matched to the child and finding out about him/her**

### **Key Events:**

- 1. Linking Meeting (with Family Finding, child's and adopter's social workers), chaired by child's Social Worker's Manager**
- 2. Foundations to Transitions Meeting (all social workers, adopters and foster carers)**
- 3. Formulation of Draft Transitions Plan**
- 4. Matching Panel and Agency Decision Making**
- 5. Transitions Planning Meeting**

### **1. Linking Meeting**

The aim of this meeting is for the Local Authority to review the matching criteria for the child and to then consider each potential adoptive family represented in terms of their potential to meet the child's individual placement needs, plus any requirements around transitions and support. Critical questions to consider during the Linking Meeting and at further meetings such as those with foster carers, and other advisers in Education and Health, include:

- How is this particular child likely to view the move?
- What have been their expectations and reactions to change in the past and what might they be now?
- What has been the foster carers' experience of how the child has reacted to change?
- How were they when they moved in with the foster carers? Specifically, did they demonstrate particular challenging or dysregulated behaviours, and might these be reactivated again?
- What is their developing understanding of how they view themselves, and their world, including other people? We refer to this as their Internal Working Model (simply put "I am ok, loveable and worthy" vs "I am not ok, unlovable and unworthy")
- How do they behave when they are anxious or worried? What are their behaviours on these occasions?
- How do they express other emotions such as anger and sadness? Do they hold them in (and pretend they are ok), or do they overtly demonstrate how

they are feeling? This information needs to be gathered as part of the Carers Report.

## 2. Foundations to Transitions Meeting

Once a child is 'Linked' to their potential adoptive family, a meeting between the child's foster carers and potential adopters is arranged and supported by the Adoption Team. The aim of this meeting, utilising a template to direct the process ([Appendix 1](#)), is to start the transfer of key information to the adoptive parents including:

- A discussion about the child's history in detail;
- Knowledge about routines and likes and dislikes and how these are managed;
- A discussion about any difficulties, past and present, that the child has/is experiencing;
- Information about the child's attachment style and needs; how they relate to people;
- An understanding of a child's complexities, in order to predict and rehearse any potential issues; how they cope with and indicate signs of stress and anxiety, for example.

The meeting needs to review the issues highlighted above so that the Adopters will have as complete as possible an understanding of what they will encounter as they become the child's new parents.

At this meeting, there is potential for the following mismatched perceptions due to how each part of this process feels. This should be acknowledged.

For the foster carers, the process may be viewed with a mixture of pride in a job well done, happiness for the child having found a 'growing up family', and sadness for the child moving on from their care.

It is suggested that foster carers bring a photograph of the child's bedroom in the foster placement to this meeting, in order that the prospective adopters have an opportunity to replicate the bedroom as much as possible, in order to maintain some sense of the familiar for the child.

The adopters may be overjoyed at hearing about their new child, but also anxious at the prospect of having to spend time with foster carers who will be 'experts' in the care their prospective adoptive child, anxious about having to spend a lot of time in a stranger's home, anxious about the possibility of not appearing 'good enough', and anxious that a lot of eyes (including a number of social workers) are focused on them.

For the child, the move may be terrifying and may, even in very young children, reactivate old traumas. These differences need to be acknowledged and talked about, between all present at the meeting, with an emphasis on the

child having very mixed feelings about moving, yet emphasising that this is normal, and expected.

### 3. Formulation of Draft Transitions Plan

The aim of the Transitions Plan ([Appendix 2](#)) is to introduce the child to their adoptive family and to begin the process of integration.

Fundamentally, transitions begin the process of building **additional** attachments to their adoptive parents by helping the child to develop trust, and feelings of safety toward their new caregivers.

There are some key aspects that are critical in this process:

- The transitions must be carefully thought through and carried out at the child's pace. This means that even if a plan is approved, it is 'live', in as much as it is ever evolving, according to the needs of the child. Draft Transitions Plans need to be drawn up in consultation with foster carers and prospective adopters.
- There is no standard timescale for the length of the transitions, though UK-wide evidence indicates the longer the better (*Selwyn et al, 2014*). A Devon Adoption policy on timescales is included in the Transitions Plan Template ([Appendix 2](#)).
- During this period, both the child and the adults take time to adjust to and process new relationships. They need an adequate period of adjustment and integration to get to know each other.
- The transitions should build up in time and intensity. Beginning with a brief hello (of about an hour, and at the child's current home), and moving towards time spent in the child's new home, with their foster carers present. Additional to this is an increase in presence of the child's new parents, with a subsequent decrease in presence of the child's foster carers.
- Transitions are best if they allow for the child to continue experiencing as close to normal routines as possible (no new and exciting trips to adventure play parks, for example).
- The foster carers and adopters need to talk about every step to the child, to acknowledge the process and provide information on what will be happening next etc. If the child is younger, they can discuss such issues out loud with each other in front of the child, so that the child can hear and absorb the information. For an older child, and with the foster carer, they could create a planner (advent calendar style, with a flap to pull off for each day) with pictures and/or writing etc. to explain what they will be doing for each day;

- The transitions need to be well supported with access to social workers, expert external support (if identified), and possibly introductory sessions of Theraplay (a child and family therapy that has as its goal to help build feelings of safety and trust for a child).

#### **4. Matching Panel and Agency Decision Making**

The initial recommendation to match and place a child is made by the Matching Panel. This recommendation is then ratified the Local Authority's Adoption Agency's Decision-Maker, who has the final approval.

Matching Panel can also contribute to planning around transitions if required.

It is generally agreed that the prospective adopters should bring their 'Welcome to my family' book to the Matching Panel, as well as photos, a DVD, an article of clothing from their house with their scent, and a speaking toy for babies etc.

These articles are then shared with the child, by the foster carer, on a daily basis from when Agency Decision Maker's decision is made to confirm the match, depending on the needs of the child.

For other children this may be too stressful and so this needs to be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis as part of the transitions planning;

#### **5. Transitions Planning Meeting**

This meeting is chaired by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer and is attended by the child's social worker, the adoptive parents and their Social Worker, the Foster Carers and their Social Worker and the Family Finding Social Worker.

This meeting is where the Draft Transitions Plan (formulated by the Family Finding Social Worker) and a parental responsibility form is signed off.

The draft Transitions Plan is a live document, formulated by the Family Finding Social Worker. At the Transitions Planning meeting, the draft plan is made more real, with changes that reflect the needs of the child, and the needs of the foster carers and adopters.

The final Transitions Plan is still malleable, as the aim of it is to ensure transition from one set of primary attachment figure(s), to another, in itself a changing an evolving phenomenon.

## Stage four: Continuing the child's living story/history

A child needs to have an understanding of what foster care is and why they are there. They also need to know that a 'growing up' family is being sought for them. Finally, they need to be prepared in relation to the transition process that is to come.

There are some key aspects that are critical in this process:

- There is a range of storybooks, games and a game script ([Appendix 3](#) and [Appendix 4](#)), as well as resources such as calendars and books and games on emotions, available to provide the child with an age-appropriate way of understanding what is happening to them, and why. These resources, used before, during and after the transition process, will help the child make sense of the transitions process and give them a sense of their history as they grow up.
- Photos taken during the child's time in foster care and then during transitions, will be used to create a number of books that will enhance the work of the team supporting the child, the adopters and the foster carers.

The books are:

- **Looking After Family** book – the child's time with their foster carers (and what foster carers do: look after);
- **All About Me** book – a little explanation of some of the child's history;
- **Welcome to my Family** book – created by the potential adopters;
- **Moving to my New Family** information/book – how the adopters met and got to know the child, with the help of the foster carers. This information can also be a section in the All About Me book.

Most significantly, it is hoped that the idea of a 'Looking After' family will give the child a sense that the foster carers give permission for them to move on, to their 'Growing up' family.

These books document the child's transition to their 'Growing up' family and will help the child remember and make sense of the transition.

## **Stage five: Child's transition to adoptive placement**

**The child (who displays secure attachment behaviours to his foster carers) being introduced to, and developing additional secure attachments to their prospective adoptive parent(s).**

### **Key Events:**

- 1. Introduction to Prospective Adopters**
- 2. Child Appreciation Day (for children over 3)**
- 3. Mid-way Review**

#### **1. Introduction to Prospective Adopters**

The transitions are where the work of assimilating the child to their new family takes place.

The intention during introductions is to integrate the child's 'new parents' into the child's life, until the child feels comfortable and at ease with them.

This process is guided by the Transitions Plan, and starts with a first contact, in the child's foster home. This meeting should be short, non-intrusive, low-key, and ultimately child-led, no matter how excited the prospective adopters may be feeling!

Subsequent contact in the foster placement, and later in the prospective adopters' home, will build on each previous contact, in terms of activities and tasks, and emotional and bond-building engagement.

#### **2. Child Appreciation Day**

This is an opportunity for the adoptive family to meet as many professionals involved in the child's journey to the point where they have been introduced to their new family. It is, fundamentally, an opportunity for the adoptive parents to ask questions about the child and their birth family, and to get a better idea of the challenges they may face, as the child grows up.

#### **3. Mid-way Review**

This takes place in the foster carers' home, and is an opportunity to consider how well the transitions are progressing, and if necessary, make changes to the Transitions Plan. The Mid-way Review is chaired by the Child's Social



Worker's Manager, and will include all those involved in the Transitions Planning Meeting. There is a template for this meeting, one that considers the transition and how the child is coping ([Appendix 5](#)).

Prior to the review, it is essential that the adopters have had a day of reflection to consider how things are progressing, and whether they wish continue the process.

**Critical considerations in the transition process** ([Appendix 6](#), [Appendix 7](#) and [Appendix 8](#)):

- Due to the highly emotive potential of Christmas, children are generally not placed with adoptive families around this time of year, and December is best avoided entirely.
- This transitions process allows the adoptive parents to learn about routines and maintain them during the transition period. It also helps children to feel safe with, and to build trust in the adopters, who themselves will hopefully be developing confidence in their parental role.

There is a gradual progression of tasks, such as bath time including washing hair, and bedtime, with a story. The adoptive parents observe at first, then help, and then do.

Within the progression of tasks, foster carers need to give permission; they need to be seen by the child concerned to ask the adopters to take part in joining in with activities and looking after the child.

Foster carers need to be seen to be handing over caring responsibilities to the adopters, who increasingly lead the care during the second half of transitions.

- Activities (not too exciting and over stimulating) will promote positive interaction and fun, such as playing with special toys, visits to the local park, swimming, and most importantly, activities that are done routinely.

Playing as a group (foster cares and adopters) with the child is crucial, in order to emphasise to the child that their 'Growing up' family are learning their family culture and atmosphere.

Playing as a group could include ball games, drawing games, and nursery rhymes, which involve the whole group. The games should be fun and not competitive or too stimulating to ensure that the child does not get too overexcited.

With the aim of building and maintaining safety and trust, games could include those incorporated into Devon Adoption's booklet on Theraplay-based games ([Appendix 9](#))



- It is not suitable for the plan to include sessions where the child is left alone with the adopters, during the first couple of days or even the first week.
- Research shows that in a very high percentage of cases where adoptions have sadly disrupted, one of the consistent factors has been that transitions were too short, rushed, badly planned or not supported and adopters didn't feel comfortable in taking the child home.

If the adopters are expressing uncertainty, misgivings and doubt during introductions, it is better to slow down the process, even though this may be deeply upsetting for all concerned, rather than continue at the same pace, which may lead to a disruption in the future, a situation which is much harder to untangle and will have a much more long-lasting impact on the child.

- No matter how young a child is, even if a baby, they will still have a sense of what is happening and will be feeling unsettled and insecure. If they have been with the foster carers for a period, then they will be feeling grief and loss, for them, as well as their birth family.

Consideration also needs to be given to the sensory experiences of the non-verbal child, for whom sounds, smells and visual stimuli are essential, and need to be incorporated into the planning for Transitions.

- If the child appears to be taking it in their stride, it does not mean they are fine and that introductions should be shortened.

Many of the children we work with are unable to express their feelings because of their background, therefore whilst they may present as taking the process in their stride, it is very unlikely this is the case. Moreover, it is likely they are experiencing a sense of loss and trauma, particularly if they have been with their foster carers for a period of time, yet are unable to express these feelings, due to their childhood history.

Devon County Council has worked with a number of children who seemed fine during introductions and afterwards. However, we now have examples of children who thought their adoptive parents had stolen them, or where they believed themselves to be 'lodging' with their adoptive family; issues that only arose during later childhood or adolescence, when overwhelming behaviour issues came to the fore.

- The Transitions Plan should also take account of a child's need to say goodbye to his/her school, and other regular activities, such as after school clubs, depending on their age and need.

There may be future opportunities for a significant adult, such as a teacher to visit the child, once placed with their adoptive family, in order to support them in managing feelings of loss around their previous school or activities.

## Stage six: The nesting period

### Key concepts:

- **Focus on the smaller family unit**

The focus needs to be kept on the smaller family unit for a sustained period of time, with an emphasis needs to be on family activities, games and routines.

The role of the family and parents needs to be highlighted to the child on an ongoing basis and in a low-key gentle manner, linking the role back to the 'keeping safe' message from the life story books, as often children do not have an understanding of the parental and family role (including any siblings).

- **Low-key, calm routines**

The low-key, calming routines and activities from the transitions period should be continued; such as going to the local park and playing family games (including Theraplay based games). This is to help increase the feeling of safety for the child.

Over-stimulating activities and outings should be avoided; the child will already be in a higher state of arousal and anxiety due to the situation of moving to their new 'growing up' family, with all the emotional pressure that that will entail. Any further stimulation is likely to cause distress or dysregulation, as a child cannot take on lots of things all at once. This will take time.

The child might well enjoy each individual experience on its own but if there are too many, then many children will experience sensory and emotional overload, and feel overwhelmed. This will then start to come out in their behaviour.

Being mindful of the child's inner world and feelings will go a long way to help them to develop security and trust with their new family ([Appendix 10](#)).

Holidays are to be avoided for at least six months, ideally twelve months.

- **Meeting the adopters' wider family and friends**

Devon County Council (and other agencies, such as Barnardo's) recommends that adopters leave a period of time before they introduce family and friends following placement of the child.

Depending on the children and their specific needs this could be for a relatively considerable period of time afterwards.

This is to try and reduce the anxiety and fear that children may be experiencing having been moved several times already, including from a stable and caring foster placement.

If strangers are introduced too soon into the family, the children may well experience fear and anxiety that they will be moved again. It also may trigger memories and anxieties of previous early childhood experiences, for example, living in a birth family with lots of strangers coming and going.

When introductions to new family members and/or friends take place, they must be carefully planned around the needs of the child and kept brief and informal, in the new home, and with lots of preparation, explanation and reassurance by the adoptive parents before and after.

Photos are useful to support explanations.

This guidance is reaffirmed frequently from feedback from adopters, who sometimes choose not to follow this advice, and introduce family members and/or friends too soon, in too big a group, and for too long.

They have often observed that their child demonstrates difficulties and anxiety through their behaviour during or soon after the meeting. Additional 'family' members, such as new pets, should also not be introduced too soon.

However, it is also recognised that single adopters may well need support sooner.

In these circumstances, we advise that they only introduce initial and limited back-up carers, such as grandparents, and also, at first, limit the time of any such introduction, ensuring they keep their focus on the child's needs.

- **A gradual staged introduction to play-group / childcare / nursery / pre-school / school**

Children should not be rushed into the above, as they need prolonged time in the smaller family unit. If they are not given the time to begin to gain an understanding of their adoptive parents as their 'safe base', taking a child to a play-group can be very distressing for them.

Furthermore, without a 'safe base' they are likely to approach strangers or sometimes believe that they are to be taken home by other parents there.

Alternatively, a child may appear to be 'ok' with it all, but in reality, there will often be small signs of distress and anxiety present, that pre-empt very high levels of distress and associated behavioural disturbance.

Foster carers may talk about children being very sociable and needing to be introduced to external activities/school etc. very quickly. The foster carers may well recommend that adopters continue to take the child to a toddler group, as they are so sociable etc. However, an adoptive family need to build a different kind of relationship with their child – a ‘Growing up’ one – not just a ‘Looking after’ relationship.

An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to each other; their relationship will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family.

Their relationship with each other needs to be given the time and the space to root itself and begin growing, without the distraction of other people, activities, nursery, toddler groups etc.

Discussions about being on roll and transfer between schools with timetables should be discussed and agreed at the transitions stage. These discussions many need to include the Virtual Head (See [Appendix 2](#) for Devon County Council Policy).

**Stage seven: Moving on, whilst maintaining contact with his/her significant carers**

Moving on is a time for a proper ending, not a forever goodbye, as abrupt endings are likely to lead to separation and loss issues for the child, therefore language that suggests the continuation of relationships is critical.

What we know about attachment in terms of the Transition from foster carers to the prospective adoptive family is very different from twenty years ago. Previously it was thought that a child should be supported in transferring his/her attachment from one set of carers to another (such as, from foster carers to adoptive parents). The prevailing thinking was that when children were adopted, they formed 'new' attachments to their adoptive parent(s). This suggested that the secure attachments formed with foster carers were then to be replaced, and as such were their 'old' ones.

However, what we now know is that (ideally) foster carers support a child to begin developing a strong 'Internal Working Model' (including resilience, confidence, self-esteem, problem-solving abilities), and because of this, they are therefore capable of developing additional (earned) secure attachments.

It is acknowledged that foster carers will not be primary attachment figures unless they have cared for the infant/child between birth and one year to a significant degree. However, in most cases, they will be significant and meaningful adults to the child and are likely to represent what sense of security the child has managed to internalise. Relationships are the "Golden Thread" running through a child's life, and there is evidence that the child may suffer grief and loss, unless the foster carers are available to them, after they have moved to their new home.

This shift in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers play in supporting a child in the Transition to their new family, and advocates a need for the benign presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the Transition process.

Previous knowledge directed a decision that a child required up to a number of months to 'settle' into their new family before having any contact with their previous foster carers.

However, given the current understanding, and insight into the potentially traumatising impact of effectively 'losing' their main caregivers, and of being left with a sense that they have been rejected or abandoned by them, it is now recommended that the child has contact with his/her foster carers sometime immediately after they are placed with their adoptive parents.

Good practice, learning from disruptions and adopter feedback has resulted in the following Contact Schedule, after a child has been placed with their prospective adopters, and up to the point of the courts granting an Adoption Order.

As these contacts will take place up to the point of the Adoption Order, they will add to the Child in Care process. These contacts and discussions around the Transition Plan will be embedded within the child's Care Plan and reviewed through the Child in Care process, as any assessments of the child's transition to their new home will be enhanced by feedback on these contacts.

There will be cases where, due to the child's needs, and the location of the adoptive family, the schedule of contact may need to be adjusted. However, the schedule below is the 'Gold Standard', now Devon County Council policy, which all Introductions Plans should follow. Throughout all planning and decision-making, it is imperative that the child's needs are held in mind.

Whilst most of the contacts set out below involve face-to-face contact, alternative means of indirect contact using Skype, telephone calls and letters/cards between these contacts, have been evidenced as a useful method for the child to maintain a relationship with their foster carers, and to support the settling in process, and ultimately strengthening the attachment of the child to their adoptive family.

## Suggested Post-Placement Contact Schedule

The following schedule is to be built into the Transitions Plan, on a case-by-case basis:

Within first 2 weeks of child being placed with adopters:  
Indirect Contact with Foster carers (via telephone/Skype/card/letter as appropriate)

After 2 weeks and within 4 weeks of placement:  
Direct Contact with Foster carers (**'Pop-round'** visit)

Within 28 days of placement:  
1st Child in Care Review

4-8 weeks after 'Pop-round' Contact:  
Direct Contact with Foster carers (**'Assimilation'** meeting)

Within 3 months of 1st Review:  
2nd Child in Care Review

3-4 months after 'Assimilation' Contact:  
3rd Direct Contact with Foster carers (**'Affirmation'** meeting)

Within 6 months of 2nd Review:  
3rd Child in Care Review

A detailed explanation of indirect and direct contact with foster carers ('Pop-round', 'Assimilation' and 'Affirmation' contacts) is included in [Appendix 11](#).

Please see [Appendix 12](#) for scripts for foster carers and adopters.



## References

**This guidance was written with advice and support from The Consultancy, Adoption & Fostering Support Agency, Exeter, Devon.**

### Additional References:

Boswell, S & Cudmore, L (2014), '*The children were fine*': acknowledging complex feelings in the move from foster care to adoption, Adoption & Fostering, Vol 38(1), p5-21, Sage

Department for Education (2015) *Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015* Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2014-to-2015> (Accessed: 01/10/15)

Department for Education, *Statutory Guidance on Adoption (for local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies*, July 2013

Henry, D (2005) *The 3-5-7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency* Children and Youth Services Review 27(2) 197-212

Hughes, D (2006) *Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children* New York: Aronson

Jernberg, A (1979) *Theraplay: A New Treatment Using Structured Play for Problem Children and Their Families*

Perry, B (2006) *Applying Principles of Neurodevelopment to Clinical Work with Maltreated and Traumatized Children The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics* from Webb, NB (ed) (2006) *Working with Traumatized Youth in Child Welfare* New York: The Guildford Press

Selwyn, J, Wijedasa, D, Meakings, S (2014), *Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*, Department for Education, University of Bristol

Van der Kolk B. A. (2004) in *Biological psychiatry, Psychobiology of posttraumatic stress disorder*, ed Panksepp J. (Wiley-Liss, Hoboken, NJ), pp 319–344.

## Recommended reading

Booth, P and Jernberg, A (2010) *Theraplay. Helping Parents and Children Build Better Relationships Through Attachment Based Play* 3rd Edition San Francisco: Jossey-Pass

Golding, K and Hughes, D (2012) *Creating Loving Attachments. Parenting with PACE to Nurture Confidence and Security in the Troubled Child* London: Jessica Kingsley.

<http://www.thechildrenwerefine.co.uk/> (Boswell and Cudmore, 2015)

## Appendix 1: Foundations to Transitions Meeting Template

### Agenda and minutes of initial meeting between foster carer and adoptive parent(s)

**Date:**

**Attendees:**

**(Family Finder, adopter(s), adopter(s) social worker, foster carer(s) and supervising social worker)**

**Aim:** To develop a shared understanding of what living and caring for the child is like on a daily basis. The adopters will need to start gaining a complete as possible an understanding of what they will encounter as they become the child's new parents.

At this meeting, the potential mismatch between all concerned in how the introductions process is viewed and the differing emotions should be acknowledged and explored.

Areas to consider in detail:

- What the child was like (e.g. behaviour, routines, emotional state, self-care etc.) when they arrived in foster care?
- How they have changed and why?
- Knowledge about current routines (updating on the carers report).
- Child's likes and dislikes and how these are managed.
- A discussion about any difficulties, past and present, that the child has/is experiencing. An understanding of a child's complexities, in order to predict and rehearse any potential issues, including how they manage change.
- Information about the child's attachment style and needs; for example, how they relate to people and how they deal with heightened emotions.
- How the foster carer(s) support and manage the child's emotions, behaviour etc.

## Appendix 2: Transitions Plan Template

CHILD'S NAME:		DOB:	
CARE FIRST NO:		DATE PLAN WRITTEN:	

Key Personnel and contact details:

ROLE	NAME	AGENCY	MOBILE	LANDLINE	ATTEND MEETING
Child's SW					
Child's SW Manager					
Adopter					
Adopter					
Adoption SW					
Adoption Family Finder					
Adoption Manager					
Foster Carer					
Foster Carer					
Fostering Link Worker					
IRO					

**Introductions Plan (to be extended as required, including key elements), to allow a child and adopted family to 'nest' and settle:**

A minimum period of 1 week may be suitable for Foster to Adopt. In most cases, however, the introductions need to be longer. When it is an older child it should be a *minimum* of two weeks. Recent UK-wide evidence (Selwyn et al, 2014) indicates that introductions should be longer as this leads to better outcomes for the child and adoptive family in the long term. Improving transitions helps the child feel safe and secure, enabling them to begin to build new attachments to their new family. Our experience also shows that improved transitions also help to reduce disruptions in the long term.

***If a reduced Introductions Plan is being considered, IRO agreement and Operations Manager approval is required.***

It is important when planning around education and a school move that children and adopters are given the opportunity to form bonds by not rushing

into school too early. This is a recognised need and should be recorded as an 'authorised absence' in adoption cases. When starting school, the child will need a planned gradual introduction to school.

### ALL DECISIONS SHOULD BE AT THE CHILD'S PACE.

#### Child's routine (information from foster carer)

TIME	ACTIVITY	COMMENTS

DATE AND TIME	ACTIVITIES AND LOCATION	SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS OR COMMENTS – who is available for support if needed
	Transitions Planning Meeting	
	Child Appreciation Day (over age of 3)	
	Meeting Birth Parents	
	Reflection day	
	Review of Introductions	Review of Introductions Form to be used and put on system for IRO to see prior to First CIC review
	Placement Date	Child's SW to be available for official handover.
Within 2 weeks of placement	Indirect Contact with Foster Carers	(telephone, skype, card, letter)
After 2 weeks and within 4 weeks	Direct Contact with Foster Carers	'Pop around' visit
4 – 8 weeks after 'Pop-around' contact	Direct Contact with Foster Carers	'Assimilation' contact – somewhere neutral for a short visit
3 to 4 months after 'Assimilation' contact	Direct Contact with Foster Carers	'Affirmation' contact – somewhere neutral for a short visit

### Appendix 3: Recommended book list

#### Books about doing life story work and creating a life story book:

- Life Story Work With Children Who Are Fostered or Adopted: Creative Ideas and Activities (Katie Wrench)
- Life Story Books for Adopted Children: A Family Friendly Approach (Joy Rees)
- Listening to Children's Wishes and Feelings (Mary Corrigan and Joan Moore)
- Life Story Work (Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker)
- Life Books - Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child (Beth O'Malley)
- 20 Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew (Sherrie Eldridge)
- Helping Children to Build Self Esteem: a Printable Activities Book (Deborah Plummer)
- Telling the Truth to Your Adopted Child. Making Sense of the Past (Betsy Keifer)

#### Books that offer advice and insight into behaviour:

- Why Can't My Child Behave?: Empathic Parenting Strategies that Work for Adoptive and Foster Families (Amber Elliot)
- Beyond Consequences, Logic and Control: A Love Based Approach to Helping Attachment Challenged Children with Severe Behaviours. (Heather Forbes and Bryan Post)
- Managing Difficult Behaviour BAAF. A Handbook for Foster Carers under 12 (Clare Pallett, Kathy Blackeby, William Yule, Roger Weissman and Stephen Scott with Eileen Fusland )
- How To Think About Caring for a Child with Difficult Behaviour. (Dr Joanna North)
- The Emotional Experience of Adoption (Debbie Hindle and Graham Shulman)
- Parenting a Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (Parenting Matters) (Daniel Hughes)
- Building the Bonds of Attachment (Daniel Hughes)
- A Child's Journey through Placement (Vera Fahlberg)
- First Steps in Parenting the Child who Hurts: Tiddlers and Toddlers (Caroline Archer)
- Next Steps in parenting the Child who Hurts: Tykes and Teens (Caroline Archer)
- Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss (Claudia Jewitt)
- Talking with young children about Adoption (Mary Watkins and Susan Fisher)
- The Primal Wound - Understanding the Adopted Child (Nancy Verrier)

- Dear Birthmother (Kathleen Silber and Phyllis Speedlin)
- When Love is not Enough - A guide to Parenting Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder (Nancy Thomas)
- Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families heal and grow (Gregory Keck and Regina Kupelly)
- Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents (Deborah D Gray)
- The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to your Adoptive Family (Karyn Purvis and David Cross and Wendy Sunshine)
- Real Parents Real Children (Holly Van Gulden and Lisa M Bartels-Rabb)
- The Adoption Experience: Families who give Children a Second Chance (Ann Morris)
- The Adopter's Handbook Information, Resources and Services for Adoptive parents (Amy Neil Salter)
- Linking parents to Play Therapy (Killough McGuire and D McGuire)
- What To Do When range of books – covering topics such as anxiety, anger (Dawn Huebner)

### **Books for reading with young children:**

- The Bean Seed (Judith Bush and Robert Spottswood) *(about neglect)*
- Badgers Parting Gifts (Susan Varley) *(about loss)*
- Goodbye Mog (Judith Kerr) *(about loss)*
- The Invisible String (Patricia Cast) *(about separation anxiety and grief)*
- Nothing (Michael Inkpen) *(focusses on self-esteem)*
- The Huge Bag of Worries (Virginia Ironside) *(good for encouraging sharing of worry)*
- No Matter What (Debi Gliori) *(about unconditional love)*
- Guess how much I love you (Sam McBratney)
- The Hyperactive Turtle (Deborah Moss)
- Morris and the Bundle of Worries (Jill Seeney) *(specifically about adoption)*
- Elfa and the Box of Memories (Michelle Bell and Rachel Fuller) *(good for exploring different sorts of memories and includes an activity notepad at back)*
- Muddles Puddles and Sunshine (Winston Wish and Diana Crossley) *(an activity book for helping children when someone has died)*
- Faces (Jan Pienkowski) *(good for talking about feelings with children between 18 months and 4 years)*
- Scaredy Squirrel (Melanie Watt)
- Happy Cat books *(good for talking about anxiety for children between 3 and 8)*
- The Bear Under the Stairs (Helen Cooper) *(good for thinking about fear and attachments)*
- Can't you Sleep Little Bear? (Maurice Waddell and Barbara Firth)



- (good for attachment and feeling close)*
- Where the Wild Things Are (Maurice Sendak)
- No David (David Shannon) *(loved by children very funny and about naughty behaviour)*
- Slam (Adam Stower) *(looks at the consequences of a door slammed in anger!)*
- I Don't Want to go to Bed (Tony Ross)
- I Hate School (Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross) *(a child realises that she does not hate it as much as she thinks she does)*
- The Paddington Books (Michael Bond)
- The Owl Babies (Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson) *(about a mummy owl who does return to the nest. Good for encouraging feelings of security)*
- Sad (Michael Rosen) *(a book that acknowledges real feelings of sadness and loss for under 5's)*

**Books for helping children in differing emotional states, all by Margo Sunderland:**

- A Nifflenoo called Nevermind *(a story for children who bottle up feelings)*
- Willy and the Wobbly House *(a story for children who are anxious or obsessional)*
- A Pea called Mildred *(a story to help children pursue hopes and dreams)*
- The Frog Who Longed for the Moon to Smile *(to help children with grief)*
- The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back *(helping children with loss)*
- Ruby and Rubbish Bin *(helping children with low self-esteem)*
- How Hattie Hated Kindness *(helping children with locked in rage or hate)*
- Teenie Weenie in a Too Big World *(helping children with fear)*
- A Wibble Called Biple and a Few Honks *(for children who have hardened their hearts or become bullies)*

**Books about Race, Culture and Adoption:**

- Looking After our Own (Edited by Hope Messiah)
- The stories of Black and Asian Adopters. In Black and White; the Story of an Open Transracial Adoption (Nathalie Seymour)
- In Search of Belonging: Reflections of Transracially Adopted People. (Perlita Harris)



**Books specifically about different families, foster care and adoption for children:**

- Dennis Duckling range of books (Paul Sambrooks) (*includes foster care and special guardians*)
- Katie Kitten books – on fostering and adoption (Plymouth City Council) – free to download from links below:  
[http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/katie\\_kitten\\_goes\\_into\\_foster\\_care.pdf](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/katie_kitten_goes_into_foster_care.pdf)  
[http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/katie\\_kitten\\_gets\\_adopted.pdf](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/katie_kitten_gets_adopted.pdf)
- Finding a Family for Tommy (Rebecca Daniel) (*this book can be read in preparation for a move from foster care and during introductions to permanent carers or adopters*)
- One Marble a Day: An Adoption Story for Children Who Are Adopted, in Long-term Fostering or Waiting for a Permanent Family (Camille Gibbs)
- We Belong Together: A Book about Adoption and Families (Todd Parr)
- The Family Book (Todd Parr)
- The Lamb-a-roo (Diana Kimpton)

All of the below are sensitive to gay and lesbian families in their use of language:

- Its OK to be Different (Todd Parr)
- Josh and Jaz Have Three Mums (Hedi Argent and Amanda Wood)
- Dad David and Baba Chris and ME (Ed Merchant and Rachel Fuller)
- Chester and Daisy Move On - A story about two Bear Cubs who are Adopted (Angela Lidster) (*the majority of this book is about the build up to adoption but still useful for reflecting with children on past*)
- BAAF Nutmeg Gets Adopted (Judith Foxon)
- Build up to Adoption. BAAF
- Nutmeg Gets Cross (Judith Foxon) (*good for post adoption issues*)
- Andy's big question - Where do I belong? (Carolyn Nystrom) (*a child's guide to adoption revolving around a child placed at 3 yrs old. Covers facts and feelings about adoption*)

**Books about Education:**

- Attachment in the Classroom: The links between Children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school (Heather Geddes)
- Inside I'm Hurting - Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools (Louise Michelle Bomber)
- Lets Learn Together (Adoption UK). Free to download at:  
<http://www.adoptionuk.org/sites/default/files/documents/LetsLearnTogetherNIMarch2013.pdf>

### **Books about the Facts of Life and Sexual Harm:**

- How Are Babies Made? Usborne Flip Flaps (Alistair Smith and Maria Wheatley) *(very good for young children and sensitive to children who may not be with their birth parents without the point being labelled)*
- The Play Book for Kids about Sex (Joani Blank) *(this book is for children who are pre puberty)*
- I Told my Secret; a book for kids who are abused (Elina Gill)
- Keeping Children Safe - The Underwear Rule (NSPCC). Resources Free to download at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/>

### **Books about Bullying:**

- Laura's Secret (Klaus Baumgart)
- Bully For You (M Twinn)

### **Additional Internet resources:**

<http://www.thechildrenwerefine.co.uk/>

About acknowledging the complex feelings involved in the move to adoption.

<http://www.blomtree.com/>

Resources to help work with issues, using feelings and body language.

<http://www.elsa-support.co.uk/the-huge-bag-of-worries/>

Activities to do with children on emotions.

The Devon Adoption and Fostering Teams also have a collection of resources which can help children with emotions and also preparing for moves, which can be e-mailed out on request.

There are also two books produced by the Devon Adoption Team available on request:

- The Little Ladybird – which explores some of the emotions around adoption
- Tommy Snail – which looks at the separation of siblings for adoption.

## Appendix 4: Games script

**A game to play with children who are in foster care to introduce their growing up family (however, this game can also be used for different moves, such as children coming into foster care, or moving to a Special Guardianship or long term foster care placement):**

*In the example we are using below, we have used mummy and daddy as it is based on a real game that was played for a sibling pair of two and four years old, although of course, there will be new mummies and daddies/mummies and mummies/mummy/daddy etc.*

In the first instance (timing to be decided collectively in discussion with child's social worker, family finding social worker and supervising social worker so that it fits in with the introductions plan) – *foster carer to play at families with cars/trucks/favourite toys (link in to looking after family book and all the looking after things, keeping the child safe etc.). If the child does not have a looking after family book yet, your supervising social worker can provide a template.* Dip in and out of games and watch child's responses and adjust accordingly. *It is helpful for the child if the other adults or teenage children living in the foster carer's home can be aware of the games, as it is likely that the children will want to play the game with others living in the home.*

*An example of the start of the 'families game':*

With a big truck and a little truck, foster carer to talk out loud about making a nice dinner for the little truck (maybe child's favourite dish) or if they want to be more literal, a nice dinner of petrol, looking after the little truck's hurt wheel, taking the little truck out for a nice drive and some fresh air... involving the child as much as possible. Emphasise the roles of the looking after trucks in looking after and keeping the little trucks safe. Then have another family of trucks nearby, with a mummy truck and a daddy truck and talk about there being lots of different kinds of truck families out there. Some little trucks live with looking after truck families, some little trucks live with their mummies and daddies trucks and some little trucks live with their growing up mummies and daddies trucks. But all mummies and daddies trucks need to keep the little trucks safe and look after them and go through some of the looking after things again – see if child can suggest things that they need to be done for them/for the little trucks! For example, activities such as washing the little truck, taking it to the garage for check-ups, can all be helpful to explain what looking after and keeping safe means.

*What if the child won't join in?*

If the children won't join in, try playing the game out in front of them, if the child can manage this. They may be playing at something else nearby and be listening in! They may not want to play but may want to suggest or direct the game.

*Next steps:*

Keep the game flowing and alive. Play daily if you can, as part of the children's routine. *Generally speaking, children enjoy this game and will engage when the foster carers play it with them.*

*The idea of this game is for it to morph into the children's names being given to the little trucks/cars eventually and gently start introducing the fact that the children will have new mummies and daddies/mummies and mummies/mummy/daddy etc.*

Start to expand on the story for example introducing 'a *garage man*', and give it the name of the social worker, who looks after all the little trucks/cars and keeps them safe and also looks for growing up families for them, if their mummies and daddies can't keep them safe.

This can be played out by adding new trucks to the game and looking after trucks showing the other big trucks (new growing up mummies and daddies) all the things the little trucks (children) need and like to be looked after. Use same examples from the looking after books. After you have done the story a couple of times if possible with 'a mummy and a daddy' or as appropriate, then start giving the names to the little trucks i.e. the names of the children and calling the big trucks the names of the new growing up Mummy and the looking after trucks become the foster carers' name(s).

*The game will need to be repeated before moving on to the next step.*

*Timings will need to be continued to be discussed and decided collectively in discussion with child's social worker, family finding social worker and supervising social worker so that it fits in with the introductions plan and is at the appropriate speed for the child. Watching the behaviour of the child is vital in order to see how they are coping, which bits they need to focus on more. One child, for example, after the new mummy and daddy teddy bears had been named, she then carried around the foster carer teddy bear all day, repeating the foster carer's name. The foster carer then slowed the game down until she felt the child was OK with playing a bit more. The game really helped the child absorb the information at her own pace.*

The game can then move on to talk about the garage man (social worker) has found a growing up family for the little trucks called... So perhaps try saying something like 'And look here are the new growing up Mummy and Daddy trucks! The looking after trucks are going to teach the new mummy and daddy trucks what they need to know about looking after the little trucks and how they keep them safe; what their favourite meals are, which bedtime stories they like, how they like to get ready for school, what their favourite TV programmes are, for example.'

*If the children won't join in – try and play the games out in front of them. Each day recap the game the day before and build on it, but also repeat stages especially if the children are interested or are playing bits of it by themselves.*

The children's behaviour may likely show signs of upset/regression/disturbance or even no reaction– keep reassuring them through the play – or talking to the toy – naming the feelings for the child, for example, the looking after truck says to the little truck 'oh little truck you look sad' 'I wonder if you need a hug'. 'I will tell your new mummy truck that you are feeling sad and that when you feel sad you need a big hug'. You can repeat key messages like 'It is ok to feel sad and cry' and 'leaving people makes everyone feel sad - lets be sad together and have a big hug'. This is the time to be extra sensitive and understanding to the child's needs and how the child is feeling.

*Talk about how it may feel strange and scary for the little trucks moving in with the new growing up family trucks. Some children have talked about finding it difficult to call their adoptive parents mummy and daddy straight away so you could talk about this and what they can call them.*

*Also talk about how living with a new family doesn't mean that the children have to forget about their birth family or that they have to forget about birth family. Say how they can still ask questions, have photos and talk about their birth family with their new family.*

Play it by ear as to when and how you do things – then introduce the welcome to my family book using language such as "shall we find out a bit more about your new growing up family?" (again the timing of this will need to be worked out in discussion with the social workers and will usually be a day or two before the children meet their new growing up family. Introduce the book .... "Shall we have a look?" read the welcome book, play and examine new toys (including smell). The social worker can come and join in and play the game and then go through the 'welcome to my family' book the foster carer, if possible and if felt appropriate.

*The children will not understand all of it but it is about planting the seed and laying the foundations and is backed up by tone of voice, hugs and actions. The game can be played with children young and old. The game has been played with a sibling pair aged one and two, for example, a sibling pair aged two and four, and a sibling pair aged four and six. The game worked very well in all instances and was adapted by the foster carers to be age and development appropriate. All the children really benefited from the game and it helped them all at different levels.*

*The game will need to be played several times before meeting the growing up family and can also be continued during introductions to address any questions. Keep reading the welcome to my family book and linking if possible with play about looking after and keep safe families and growing up families. Keep talking about emotions and wondering how they are feeling, if they are feeling sad, for example...*

Once the day arrives for the first meeting, you can play the game again and then talk about the growing up family coming to meet them later on today, just for an hour to say hello!

After the growing up family have gone after their first visit, then explore with the children how they feel through the game. 'I wonder if the little truck is feeling muddily/fizzy depending on the age of the child and the language you use already with them about emotions.

*There will be introductions calendars for the children so the foster carers can look at these with the children and look at what they will be doing the next day. The foster carers can also use the game to look at the next day and the activities etc.*

*Then during introductions – the growing up family/adopters are to be included in the game playing during introductions to reaffirm the whole process and the ideas. This will also mean that they can learn the language that the foster carers and the children have been using. During the introductions, the game can then be developed and used to introduce the ideas of the children going to live with their growing up family, and not coming back to live with their foster carers or their tummy mummy or daddy, nor are they going to live with anyone else.*

The game can also be used to introduce the idea of seeing the foster carers again, for a picnic, or talk on the phone etc. but not going back to them. Again, use the trucks to illustrate all this.

The adopters can then use the game to practise the meeting with the foster carers, once the children have moved in with them. The game can be used to explain how the children will still be going home with their adopters, and then also to talk about how the children/trucks may be missing their foster



carers/looking after trucks and how their foster carers will be thinking of the children and keeping them in mind. The game can also talk about how the children can keep in touch with their looking after family, via skype, post card etc. as per what has been planned and agreed for post placement contact.

*Other material that is used for introducing the growing up family can be used to support the game such as a DVD of their new home, a new teddy with the smells of the new home (or other transitional object) – The adopters can watch the DVD with the foster carers and the children and then build it into the game. The teddies/toys can be involved in the game. All this can be played with the children a couple of days/the day before they move (again depending on the plan agreed with all the social workers).*

*The game can also be used to introduce idea of different places to live including bigger towns, with buses, taxis – cities etc... to help the children prepare for a change of surroundings, so you can use more toys etc. to get ideas across. The game was played with two sets of siblings who were moving to London and again it worked well for introducing the new environment; such as London buses and lots of traffic etc.*

*As can be seen, the game can be adapted to tackle a lot of questions and issues. Be as creative as you want!*

*Something that has really helped other foster carers is to discuss the game in depth with their supervising social worker and then practice playing it before playing it with the children.*

## Appendix 5: Mid-way Review Meeting template

### REVIEW OF ADOPTION INTRODUCTIONS

<b>Date of Review</b>	
<b>Date Introductions Started</b>	
<b>Chair of Review</b>	
<b>Venue</b>	
<b>Name of Child/ren</b>	
<b>Name of Adopters</b>	
<b>Attendees at Review and their role:</b>	
<b>What has gone well so far?</b>  <b>Check separately with</b> <b>Adopters</b> <b>Foster Carers</b> <b>Social workers</b> <b>Child if appropriate and any children in adoptive family if appropriate</b>	
<b>What difficulties have there been</b>	



<p>and have they been resolved?</p> <p>Check separately with  Adopters  Foster Carers  Social workers  Child if appropriate and  any children in adoptive family  if appropriate</p>	
<p>Have practical arrangements worked – if not what has to be sorted?</p>	
<p>Have you modified the original plan in any way – if so how?</p>	
<p>Are any modifications needed to the remainder of the plan?</p>	
<p>Any change to ideas on proposed post Adoption Support?</p>	
<p>Is it agreed by everyone that</p>	

<b>the introductions are to proceed to placement? Please record any dissenting views</b>	
<b>Proposed date of placement</b>	
<b>Is a further review needed before placement – either meeting or telephone review?</b>	
<b>Signed by Chair of Review and dated.</b>	

Ensure this document is then put onto System (Trim) for IRO to see prior to first review.

## Appendix 6: Transitions information for foster carers – before, during and after

### Introduction:

Imagine moving away from **all** of our life, including our family, job, friends, pets and possessions **all in one go**, as an adult, and how frightening and distressing that would be.

Now if we were to imagine a small child, one who has likely experienced much trauma, having to undergo such a move, again (having already been removed from their birth family); we may then have some sense of the potential trauma a move to an adoptive family is likely to be...

With that in mind, moving from foster care to an adoptive family may be a traumatic experience for a child who may show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers.

Additionally, children may have a range of emotions from their past evoked by the words 'mummy' and 'daddy', and such feelings will be registering in a child's brain at different levels.

The child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions.

However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Furthermore, concepts of 'permanence' and the 'future' are beyond the comprehension of children under the age of five, who have no real understanding of time. However, we know how child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move.

Recent research backs up what we in the Adoption and Fostering Teams know: it is critical that adoption planning is carried out attuned to, and with the acceptance of, the individual child's needs.

In order for a child to undertake their move to a new adoptive family, they need to feel safe and to develop a feeling of trust towards the Adopter(s), and research evidences that this feeling of safety is the key to the whole process of transitions (*Van der Kolk, 2004, Henry, 2005*).

### **Things to think about before introductions start:**

Does the child you are looking after have some understanding of:

- Why they cannot live with their birth family?
- Why they are living with you?
- What your role is?
- Why they need an adoptive/Long term family?
- When this is going to happen?
- Are they going to see important people like their foster carers after they have moved?
- What the 'Wish you well contact' is?

If you are worried about any of the above – speak to your supervising social worker and/or the child's social worker.

There are lots of books and resources available from the Fostering Team that can help prepare the child for understanding foster care and looking for a new family.

### **Preparing the child for introductions:**

Theraplay based games where possible will be used in introductions. For more information please speak to your supervising Social Worker or Family Finding Social Worker, who can run through these with you and provide a booklet on the games.

There are lots of books and resources available from the adoption team and/or your supervising social worker that can help prepare the child for looking for a new family and understanding what adoption is. For example, there is a 'game script' available that can help foster carers introduce what 'a new family' will mean for younger children. There are also templates for 'living with a looking after family' and 'moving to a new family' books and also for making moving on calendars to help a child through introductions.

### **Just before the introductions:**

Think about the timing of the 'welcome to our family' book and all other items that the adopters may provide such as photos to put on up on the children's walls, cuddly toys with the adopters' home smells on (transitions objects) and DVDs. This timing will need to be worked out with your supervising social worker, the child's social worker and the family finder.

### **Start of introductions:**

Think about what everyone will do when the adopters and child first meet – have a plan to help remove some of the anxiety as everyone will be very anxious. The meeting only lasts half an hour to an hour. This should not be extended, unless specified in the introductions plan, so as not to overwhelm the child(ren).

### **During introductions:**

- Introductions have several aims. The first is for the child to meet their family, to begin to feel safe and secure with their family and know that their new family is learning all about them, what they need, their likes and dislikes etc. And that their new family accepts them for who they are. They also need to feel that the foster carers are giving permission for them to move on. Finally, the adopters also need to begin to build their confidence in relation to caring for the child.
- Devon County Council policy states that a minimum period of one week may be suitable for Foster to Adopt cases, for example. In most cases, however, the introductions need to be longer. Recent BAAF evidence indicates that introductions should be longer as this leads to better outcomes for the child and adoptive family in the long term.
- The introductions plan start very gradually, with an initial half an hour meeting between the child and adopters. The time spent between adopters and children is gradually extended day by day. The adopters at first observe you caring for the child and then over time, you will need to involve them in the caring activities. By the end of the introductions period, there is a shift in care and the adopters are now responsible for caring for the child.
- It is important to think of visual representations of this shift in care for the child e.g. at first you feed the child as normal, then you involve the adopter, then by the end the adopter is cooking tea and feeding the child and you sit elsewhere at the table.
- The adopters need to be included in all family activities where specified, including eating together as a family around the child. The adopters need to be actively involved and not just present as observers, apart from at first.
- All activities should be calm, low-key and interactive, such as going to the local park, playing games in the house, Theraplay based games and the game script (please contact your supervising social worker for more information), reading books, jig saw puzzles, art and crafts, going for walks and playing I-Spy or collecting leaves for example, going to

the beach and rock pooling etc. Do not choose activities such as Crealy or other adventure parks, that are going to over-stimulate and over-excite the child and detract from the one-to-one interaction and relationship building. Alternatively, the child might well appear to enjoy the day but it does not help the adopters learn about the more 'tedious' looking after routines which you day in day out and that make the child feel safe.

- Do not assume the child is excited or happy about having a new mummy or daddy. They will most likely have a whole range of muddled feelings. It is easy for them to get swept up in the adults' excitement and not feel their own feelings. They need a chance to explore these with you and if necessary, have a meltdown! They need the space and time to work through these very complicated feelings.
- Some children will pretend they are OK to please the adults around them. This is the strategy they may have adopted with their birth family to get through life and keep themselves safe. They are not OK – they are about to move away from everything and everyone they know and gain a new family including perhaps siblings, new home, new bedroom, new pets, new school/pre-school, and new friends!
- Experience shows us that introductions should not be shortened or rushed. This applies to the overall plan and also the daily plan. The daily times are specified in order to build up slowly the time the child spends with the adopters, in order to begin to help them feel safe with them and not overwhelm or frighten them. The slower pace also helps children process these enormous changes to their lives, and helps them to feel their feelings.
- Please take a couple of photos of everyone together, including yourselves, adopters and child, playing a game all together or all at the park, to show the child that you have given permission to adopters for the child to move on and that you trust the adopters. These photos have proved very important to children, as they begin to piece together their various moves and what they meant.
- If you can, please start to use Skype/facetime etc. before introductions start to get the child used to it as a means of communication. Then this can be used during introductions to help the child understand that the adopters are still there after they have left the house and that they are thinking of them, during the first half of introductions. Then it can be used during second half of introductions and afterwards, between the foster carers and adopters and child, to show that the foster carers are thinking of the child and keeping them in mind. This gives the child an opportunity to express their emotions and grieve and for the adopters to comfort them.

- The 'saying goodbye' visit on the last day of introductions: this last visit will usually take place at the adopters' house. This needs to be planned in advance with the adopters, about how to say goodbye, and kept short. Showing a bit of emotion is fine but having a structured plan will reduce overwhelming feelings, for example, maybe the adopters can make a cake with the child and then give a slice to the foster carer as a present to give them as they leave – as a transitional object. It is very helpful if you can get a photo taken of yourself beforehand – waving goodbye in front of house or car. This photo can be included in the child's life story book and will again reinforce message that you as their foster carer have given permission for child to move on.
- Post-placement contact between yourselves and the adopters and child should be have been included in the introductions plan so that you can say to the child I will send a card to you very soon or I will speak to you very soon, as you say goodbye. This section needs to be discussed and planned with family finder, supervising social worker and child's social worker as what will be appropriate to say and how to manage any direct contact. Your supervising social worker will support you with this. The main aim for any such contact is for you to pass on the message that you have the child in mind and think about them, you miss them and care for them and they have not been forgotten.
- Please do not organise a holiday just after introductions have finished, as there are times when introductions need to be extended and slowed down as the child is not coping or ready to move!
- Remember that an adoptive family need to build a different kind of relationship with their child – a 'growing up' one – not a 'looking after' relationship. There is a difference between the routine that they will need to carry on from you for a period, which creates the family atmosphere and provides routine and safety for the child, and there the social patterns which they will need to change straight away, for a certain period, such as not inviting friends and family around, not sending the child to nursery or school straightaway. An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to them first and foremost; their relationship with their adopters will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family.
- It is likely you and other members of your family will be feeling anxiety, grief and loss over the departure of your foster child; please contact your fostering social worker who can support you at this time and also attend one of the fostering support groups, where you can talk to other foster carers who have shared similar experiences.

**Potential difficulties which may arise:**

- The child expressed that they want to move immediately – however, the adults around the child need to help manage their anxiety and talk to them about this, support them emotionally and make use of tools such as calendars etc.
- The child behaves as if the 'perfect child'; there can sometimes also be the temptation to speed up the transitions as they seem to be doing fine. However, we have many examples where the child has gone into meltdown shortly afterwards, as they were not ok and did not feel safe enough with adopters yet. Similarly the adopters did not have enough confidence in managing.
- If you have any difficulties with adopters – please speak to your supervising social worker, who can support you with this.



## Appendix 7: Information for adopters on transitions – before, during and after

### Introduction:

Imagine moving away from **all** of our life, including our family, job, friends, pets and possessions **all in one go**, as an adult, and how frightening and distressing that would be.

Now if we were to imagine a small child, one who has likely experienced much trauma, having to undergo such a move, again (having already been removed from their birth family); we may then have some sense of the potential trauma a move to an adoptive family is likely to be...

With that in mind, moving from foster care to an adoptive family may be a traumatic experience for a child who may show evidence of increased secure attachment behaviours to their foster carers.

Additionally, children may have a range of emotions from their past evoked by the words 'mummy' and 'daddy', and such feelings will be registering in a child's brain at different levels.

The child may revert to earlier coping strategies such as dissociation, aggression or compulsive care giving as a way of dealing with these emotions.

However well planned the move, the child is likely to experience it as a repetition of past abandonments and rejections unless such experiences are acknowledged and the child is supported to approach this transition by those responsible for its care in a conscious and conscientious manner.

Furthermore, concepts of 'permanence' and the 'future' are beyond the comprehension of children under the age of five, who have no real understanding of time. However, we know how child-focused transitions can work to address and manage the potential trauma of such a move.

Recent research backs up what we in the Adoption and Fostering teams know: it is critical that adoption planning is carried out attuned to, and with acceptance of, the individual child's needs.

In order for a child to undertake their move to a new adoptive family, they need to feel safe and to develop a feeling of trust towards the Adopter(s), and research evidences that this feeling of safety is the key to the whole process of transitions (*Van der Kolk, 2004, Henry, 2005*).

### **Things to think about before introductions start:**

The child you are adopting should be starting to have a basic understanding of:

- Why they lived with their 'looking after' family (their foster carers) and what their role was, terms of keeping them safe?
- Why they cannot live with their birth family?
- Why they need an adoptive/permanent family?
- When this is going to happen? How this is going to happen?
- Are they going to see important people like their foster carers after they have moved?
- Have they had 'Wish you well contact' with their birth family?

If you have any questions about the above please speak to your assessing social worker and/or the child's social worker.

There are lots of books and resources available from the fostering and adoption team that can help prepare the child for understanding foster care and looking for a new family.

However, it is normal for a child who is being adopted to have only a basic understanding of the above due to their age and developmental stage. One of your crucial tasks as an adopter will be to support them in developing and building on this basic understanding as your child grows up. The adoption team can support you with these tasks.

### **Preparing the child for introductions:**

Theraplay based games where possible will be used in introductions. For more information please speak to your assessing social worker or Family Finding social worker, who can run through these with you and provide a booklet on the games. Many foster carers will use these games as part of introductions; as games to play as a group.

There are lots of books and resources available from the adoption team that can help prepare the child for looking for a new family and understanding what adoption is. For example, there is a 'game script' available that many foster carers use to introduce what 'a new family' will mean for younger children. It is helpful if the foster carers play this game with you and the children during introductions. This game has then been used by many adopters following introductions to continue to help children deal with their grief and loss at moving on from their foster carers and saying goodbye to birth family.

### **Just before the introductions:**

You will have been asked to do a 'welcome to our family' book before matching panel and perhaps provide other items such as photos to put on up

on the children's walls, cuddly toys with the your home smells on (to act as transitional objects) and perhaps a DVD/CD of you reading a story book or singing a particular nursery rhyme. The child's social worker and your assessing social worker will advise on what else to provide in addition to the book, depending on the age and needs of the child.

### **Key points for the 'Welcome to our family' book:**

- Keep it very simple, short and straightforward
- Only introduce the immediate family unit – no extended family (unless you are a single carer and then only introduce the key supporters)
- Use photos – of you, the house, the garden, their room, any pets etc.
- You can include photos of you doing routine things like eating a meal, or playing a game etc.
- Keep the key message short and not too emotional – something like you are looking forward to meeting them and learning all about them, and are excited about the child coming to live with you.
- Do not use 'mummy'/'daddy' – use your first names as it is up to the child to decide when they want to start using the terms.
- If you are going to provide a transitional object like a teddy bear, it can be useful to include the teddy bear in some of the photos. This can make the book more interactive, for when you meet your child.
- Do not worry about not being arty/creative etc. It is often the most basic books that work best as they do not overwhelm the child or put any emotional pressure on them.

### **Start of introductions:**

You will most likely be very anxious and emotional about meeting your child for the first time. You do not need to prepare any games/activities. It is about them seeing you and then perhaps looking through the 'welcome to my family' book together. The meeting only lasts half an hour to an hour. This should not be extended, even though this may be tempting at the time, unless specified in the introductions plan, so as not to overwhelm the child(ren). Often the foster carers and particularly the child themselves are also highly anxious. The child may talk non-stop or be very quiet.

### **During introductions:**

The plan will avoid December

Do not work – emotionally and physically exhausting!

- Introductions have several aims. The first is for the child to meet you as their new family, to begin to feel safe, secure and to trust you and know that their new family is learning all about them, what they need, their likes and dislikes etc. They also need to start understanding that you as their new family accepts them for who they are. They also need to feel that the foster carers are giving permission for them to move on. Finally, it is also time for you to begin to build your confidence in relation to caring for the child.
- Devon County Council policy states that a minimum period of 1 week may be suitable for Foster to Adopt cases, for example. When it is an older child it should be a minimum of two weeks. Recent BAAF evidence indicates that introductions should be longer as this leads to better outcomes for the child and adoptive family in the long term.
- The introductions plan start very gradually, with an initial half an hour to an hours meeting between the child and yourselves. The time spent between you and your child is gradually extended day by day. At first you observe the foster carers caring for the child and then over time, you will be involved in the caring activities. By the end of the introductions period, there is a shift in care and you are now responsible for caring for the child.
- It is important to think of visual representations of this shift in care for the child e.g. at first the foster carers will feed the child as normal, then you will be involved, then by the end you will be cooking tea and feeding the child and the foster carer will sit elsewhere at the table.
- You will be included in all family activities where specified, including eating together as a family around the child. You will be actively involved and not just present as observers, apart from at first.
- It is not suitable for the plan to include sessions where the child is left alone with you, during the first couple of days or even the first week.
- All activities should be calm, low-key and interactive, such as going to the local park, playing games in the house, Theraplay based games and the game script (please contact your supervising social worker for more information), reading books, jig saw puzzles, art and crafts, going for walks and playing I-Spy or collecting leaves etc, going to the beach and rock pooling etc. Do not choose activities such as Creaely or adventure parks, that are going to over-stimulate and over-excite the child and detract from the one-to-one interaction and relationship building. The child might well appear to enjoy the day but it does not help the you learn about the more 'tedious' looking after routines which you will need to do day in day out and that make the child feel safe.

- Do not assume the child is excited or happy about having a new mummy or daddy. They will most likely have a whole range of muddled feelings. It is easy for them to get swept up in the adults' excitement and not feel their own feelings. They need a chance to explore these with you and their foster carers and if necessary, have a meltdown! They need the space and time to work through these very complicated feelings.
- Some children will pretend they are ok to please the adults around them. This is the strategy they may have adopted with their birth family to get through life and keep themselves safe. They are not ok – they are about to move away from everything and everyone they know and gain a new family including perhaps siblings, new home, new bedroom, new pets, new school/pre-school, and new friends! So do look out for the smaller signs of anxiety, such as chewing collars, or picking at skin etc. Ask their foster carer to tell you about such signs and how your child may have displayed or dealt with anxiety whilst living with them. Learn from the foster carer how to sooth your child.
- Experience shows us that introductions should not be shortened or rushed. This applies to the overall plan and also the daily plan. The daily times are specified in order to build up slowly the time the child spends with the adopters, in order to begin to help them feel safe with them and not overwhelm or frighten them. The slower pace also helps children process these enormous changes to their lives, and helps them to feel their feelings. Do not reduce or modify the plan with the foster carers, apart from to take into account practicalities – stick to the plan as much as possible. If you do wish to change the plan, please talk to your assessing social worker.
- Please take a couple of photos of everyone together, including yourselves, the foster carers and child, playing a game all together or all at the park. This is very important, as it will show the child that their foster carers have given permission for the child to move on and that they trust you as the child's new family. These photos have also proved very important to children, as they begin to piece together their various moves and what they meant.
- Skype/Facetime etc. can be used during introductions to help the child understand that you are still there after you have left the house and that you are thinking of them, during the first half of introductions. Then it can be used during second half of introductions and afterwards, between the foster carers and you and child, to show that the foster carers are thinking of the child and keeping them in mind. This gives the child an opportunity to express their emotions and grieve and you to comfort them.

- The 'saying goodbye' visit on the last day of introductions: this last visit will usually take place at your house. This needs to be planned in advance with the foster carers, about how to say goodbye, and kept short. Showing a bit of emotion is fine but having a structured plan will reduce overwhelming feelings, for example, maybe you can make a cake with your child and then give a slice to the foster carer as a present to give them as they leave – as a transitional object. The foster carer should provide a photo of them saying goodbye - waving goodbye in front of their house or their car and taken beforehand. This photo can be included in the child's life story book and will again reinforce message that you as their foster carer have given permission for child to move on.
- Post placement contact between yourselves and the foster carers and child should be have been included in the introductions plan so that you can say to the child your foster carer will send a card to you very soon or they will speak to you very soon, when the foster carer has said goodbye. This section needs to be discussed and planned with the family finder, your assessing social worker and child's social worker as what will be appropriate to say and how to manage any direct contact. The supervising social worker for the foster carers will support them with this. The main aim for any such contact is for the foster carers to pass on the message that they have the child in mind and think about them, they miss them and care for them and they have not been forgotten. These messages are key in helping a child begin to understand that relationships can last, which then helps them begin to understand that your relationship with each other can last. This is vital as most children who are adopted do not understand what permanence means. This contact actively and physically demonstrates long lasting relationships to the child which will help children to begin believing in and understanding the words used to describe permanence. We know from our adoption support colleagues, that some children can worry about being moved on again for years to come and so do not allow themselves to bond with their adopters.

#### **Potential difficulties which may arise:**

- The child expressed that they want to move immediately – however, the adults around the child need to help manage their anxiety and talk to them about this, support them emotionally and make use of tools such as calendars etc.
- The child behaves as if the 'perfect child'; there can sometimes also be the temptation to speed up the transitions as they seem to be doing fine. However, we have many examples where the child has gone into meltdown shortly afterwards, as they were not ok and did not feel safe



enough with their new family yet. Similarly their new family did not have enough confidence in helping the child to manage these emotions.

- During the introductions, there will be a day of reflection for yourselves just before the mid-way review. Please use this for reflection and not to do odd jobs etc. Please discuss these feelings with your assessing social worker. If you are experiencing a high level of such feelings, please really consider whether this is the match for you. If you have any feelings at all of uncertainty, misgivings and doubt, or gut feeling during introductions, it is better to slow down or stop the process, even though this may be deeply upsetting for all concerned, rather than continue at the same pace or at all, which may lead to a disruption in the future, a situation which is much harder to untangle and will have a much more long-lasting impact on the child and you.
- If you have any issues, question or worries– please speak to your assessing social worker, who can support you with these.

### **The nesting period**

After introductions, comes the nesting period where you spend quality and exclusive time with your child, in order to begin to build bonds. The key concepts are:

- **A focus on the smaller family unit**

The focus needs to be kept on the smaller family unit for a sustained period of time, with an emphasis needs to be on family activities, games and routines.

The role of the family and parents needs to be highlighted to the child on an ongoing basis and in a low-key gentle manner, linking the role back to the 'keeping safe' message from the life story books, as often children do not have an understanding of the parental and family role (including any siblings).

- **Low-key, calm routines**

The low-key, calming routines and activities from the transitions period should be continued; such as going to the local park and playing family games (including Theraplay based games) etc. This is to help increase the feeling of safety for the child. When you go out, talk through each step and then the return home at the end of the day. Clarity about what is happening next and repetition about the journey home and returning home will help your child, over time, to begin to build a sense of safety and also to develop an understanding that they are here to stay with you.

Over-stimulating activities and outings should be avoided; the child will already be in a higher state of arousal and anxiety due to the situation of moving to their new 'growing up' family, with all the emotional pressure that

that will entail. Any further stimulation is likely to cause distress or dysregulation, as a child cannot take on lots of things all at once. This will take time.

Remember a child cannot take on lots of new things all at once! This will take time. The child might well enjoy each individual experience on its own but if there are too many, then many children will experience sensory and emotional overload, and feel overwhelmed. This will then start to come out in their behaviour.

Being mindful of the child's inner world and feelings will go a long way to help them to develop security and trust with you, as their new family.

Holidays are to be avoided for at least six months, ideally twelve months, for similar reasons. Many adopters have reported to our adoption support team that children have had complete meltdowns if taken on holiday too soon.

Any special events, such as birthdays and Christmas, if they come up relatively quickly after placement, need to be kept calm, quiet and low key for the same reasons, with a minimum number of presents. Children may find such events too much for a number of reasons, such as bringing back memories of birth family etc. or they cannot cope with the anxiety of a change to their routine and the heightened emotions of such events, as well as the focus on family. It is completely understandable to wish to spoil your children and give them the material things and new experiences they perhaps did not have in their birth family, but it is your time, attention, love and understanding that will make all the difference to them in the long term.

- **Meeting the adopters' wider family and friends**

Devon County Council (and other agencies, such as Barnardo's) recommend that adopters leave a period of time before they introduce family and friends following placement of the child.

Depending on the children and their specific needs this could be for a relatively considerable period of time afterwards.

This is to try and reduce the anxiety and fear that children may be experiencing having been moved several times already, including from a stable and caring foster placement.

If strangers are introduced too soon into the family, the children may well experience fear and anxiety that they will be moved again. It also may trigger memories and anxieties of previous early childhood experiences, for example, living in a birth family with lots of strangers coming and going.

When introductions to new family members and/or friends take place, they must be carefully planned around the needs of the child and kept brief and



informal, in the new home, and with lots of preparation, explanation and reassurance by the adoptive parents before and after.

Photos are useful to support explanations.

This guidance is reaffirmed frequently from feedback from adopters, who sometimes choose not to follow this advice, and introduce family members and/or friends too soon, in too big a group, and for too long.

They have often observed that their child demonstrated difficulties and anxiety through their behaviour during or soon after the meeting. Additional 'family' members, such as new pets, should also not be introduced too soon.

However, it is also recognised that single adopters may well need support sooner.

In these circumstances, we advise that you only introduce initial and limited back-up carers, such as grandparents, and also, at first, limit the time of any such introduction, ensuring their focus is on the child's needs.

- **A gradual staged introduction to play-group / childcare / nursery / pre-school / school**

Children should not be rushed into the above, as they need prolonged time in the smaller family unit. If they are not given the time to begin to gain an understanding of their adoptive parents as their 'safe base', taking a child to a play-group can be very distressing for them.

Furthermore, without a 'safe base' they are likely to approach strangers or sometimes believe that they are to be taken home by other parents there.

Alternatively, a child may appear to be 'ok' with it all, but in reality, there will often be small signs of distress and anxiety present, that pre-empt very high levels of distress and associated behavioural disturbance.

Foster carers may talk about children being very sociable and needing to be introduced to external activities/school etc. very quickly. The foster carers for your child may well recommend that you continue to take the child to a toddler group, as they are so sociable etc. However, an adoptive family need to build a different kind of relationship with their child – a 'Growing up' one – not a 'Looking after' relationship. There is a difference between the routine that you will need to carry on from the foster carers for a period, which creates the family atmosphere and provides routine and safety for your child, and there are the social patterns which you do need to change straight away, for the nesting period.

An adopted child needs their adoptive family more than they need others – they need to start building their bond to you first and foremost; their

relationship with you will be one of the main building blocks for all future relationships and will help to override their experiences of their initial relationship with their birth family.

Their relationship with you needs to be given the time and the space to root itself and begin growing, without the distraction of other people, activities, nursery, toddler groups etc. You need to become the centre of their world, 'special' to them, before their world can expand safely and successfully.

If you have any queries about your child starting nursery, school etc. or meeting family and when to go on holiday and the timings, please contact your assessing social worker.

### **The future:**

There will most likely be a honeymoon period at first, when your child seems 'fine' and seems to be coping with it all. Watch out for signs such as nervous tics, sleep disturbances etc.

You will need to tap into your child's emotions and not rely on rational discussions with them – they will most likely be feeling hurt, helpless, inadequate, sad, angry... and this is also a reflection on how you might be feeling too, faced with such a complicated and difficult parenting task! After such a long and complex journey to get here – to having your own child, living with you. Yet they may not feel like your own child yet – it may feel like you are looking after someone else's child for a while. This is completely normal – it takes time to build a bond. Your child will be feeling this too.

Take their emotions seriously; they may be feeling pain, fear, grief etc. which causes them distress and then they may act out. This does not mean giving in or tolerating bad behaviour. However, it does mean acknowledging and starting to address the emotional roots of any such behaviour.

It is not always about knowing or finding out the answers for your child or about getting it right. The most important thing you can do for your child is to be there and accept their emotions. Sit with them and give them a hug, if you can!

Don't take your child's behaviour personally – it will most likely stem from their early years and what happened to them. It is ok to feel hurt and rejected by their behaviour... and you don't have to pretend that everything is ok. Your emotional response to your child and their behaviour is valid! Recognise and own it.

Adoptive families have told us that there will be difficult times for all adoptive families and you will need to expect this. There are no quick, easy solutions and what will work for children with a secure attachment will not work for your

child. They will need parenting differently and you may have to explain to family and friends why you need to parent differently. Ask them for their help in this! The re-parenting and emotional repair of your child is a long term project; it is going to take years, if not forever.

You can (and must) talk to other people; other adopters, friends and family, the adoption support team... You will need support at some point; do not hesitate to get in touch.

## Appendix 8: Helpful language for use with children during and after transitions

- I wonder if/maybe you are feeling really wobbly/fizzy/muddily...
- Sometimes when we wake in the night, it can be for all sorts of reasons. We might be missing someone... Maybe you are missing... (name of foster carer, friend, cat etc.). Shall we write them a postcard/make them a card... Sometimes it is hard to go to sleep when you have lots of thoughts in your head...
- You look like you are feeling sad/angry etc. It is a very, very big thing to move to a new house, school, family... especially when you really liked living with... and felt safe there.
- Lets look at the 'looking after family' book/photos etc.
- Maybe you are angry with mummy/daddy for taking you away from your house, school, family etc...
- It must be really hard for you because mummy/daddy said you can't have the sweets. But I wonder if maybe you are angry too because you think I have taken you away from....
- If a child has fallen over and is being rejecting – 'maybe you feel very sad because you want a hug from .... And not from me. That is really hard – perhaps I could try and help you with that...
- You seem to be really struggling to do what Mummy/Daddy is asking – how can I help you with that?
- 'I wonder if... / I am curious about ...'
- It sounds like... / It feels like...
- Maybe, perhaps, sometimes people feel...
- Lots of people...
- It is ok to feel like that; if I were you I might too...
- I notice there are some tricky/big feelings
- Wow, that must be really hard for you...

- This must be really scary for you...
- I notice you look really sad about that...
- I can really hear that you are sad today... etc.
- Things seem really difficult for you today...
- I can see you have lots of strong feelings today...
- Why don't/How about I help you with that...?
- That is a puzzle – we are going to have to think about what to do about that...
- Talk aloud to each other; between adults or to the cat etc...'I wonder what is happening to .... right now...'
- Finally, avoid the following questions: Why? What is the matter?  
Children struggle with such questions as they do not have often have the ability to recognise what their emotion is, to put it into language, or cannot begin to make the links between a certain emotion and their past/things that have happened to them.

## **Appendix 9: Devon Adoption Theraplay based games booklet**



Appendix 9 - Devon Adoption Theraplay Based Games Booklet.pdf

Also download from: <http://devon.cc/theraplaybooklet>

## Appendix 10: Top tips for when the child arrives



Appendix 10 - Top tips for adopters for when child arrives.pdf

Also download from: <http://devon.cc/toptipschild>

## Appendix 11: Foster carer contact schedule

### Rationale

Moving on is a time for a proper ending, not a forever goodbye, as abrupt endings are likely to lead to separation and loss issues for the child, therefore language that suggests the continuation of relationships is critical.

When it is time for the child to move to their prospective adopter's home, it is important that as much of their world that is moveable, moves with them. Whilst there may be a temptation to consider that the child is having a new beginning, what they need is the reassurance and sensory memory of their time with their primary carers with its familiar sights, sounds, and smells moving with them.

**Appendix 8** illustrates the need to ensure that the sensory experience of the child is given consideration, and examples of best practice that ensure continuity, include taking the child's bedding to their new home, so they have a familiar texture and smell next to them when they first sleep in an essentially unfamiliar environment.

What we know about attachment in terms of the transition from foster carers to the prospective adoptive family is very different from twenty years ago. Previously it was thought that a child should be supported in transferring his/her attachment from one set of carers to another (i.e. from foster carers to adoptive parents). The prevailing thinking was that when children were adopted, they formed 'new' attachments to their adoptive parent(s). This suggested that the secure attachments formed with foster carers were then to be replaced, and as such were their 'old' ones.

However, what we now know is that (ideally) foster carers support a child to develop a strong internal working model (incorporating resilience, confidence, self-esteem, problem-solving abilities), and because of this, they are therefore capable of developing additional (earned) secure attachments.

It is acknowledged that foster carers will not be primary attachment figures unless they have cared for the infant/child between birth and one year to a significant degree. However, in most cases, they will be significant and meaningful adults to the child and are likely to represent what sense of security the child has managed to internalise. Relationships are the "Golden Thread" running through a child's life, and there is evidence that the child will suffer grief and loss, unless the foster carers are available to them, after they have moved to their new home.

This shift in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers play in supporting a child in the transition to their new family, and advocates a need



for the benign presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the Transition process.

We would hope that the relationship between a child and their foster carer is an enduring one. If such a message is given clearly to the prospective adopters, at the start, they may be more prepared to invest in a relationship with the foster carers, as it will not be seen as transient.

Previous knowledge directed a decision that a child required up to a number of months to 'settle' into their new family before having any contact with their previous foster carers.

However, given the current understanding, and insight into the potentially traumatising impact of effectively 'losing' their main caregivers, and of being left with a sense that they have been rejected or abandoned by them, it is now recommended that the child has contact with his/her foster carers sometime immediately after they are placed with their adoptive parents.

Discussion with The Consultancy, an Exeter-based adoption and fostering support agency, has resulted in the following 'Contact Schedule', after a child has been placed with their prospective adopters, and up to the point of the courts granting an Adoption Order.

As these contacts will take place up to the point of the Adoption Order, they will add to the Child in Care process. These contacts and discussions around the Transition Plan will be embedded within the child's Care Plan and reviewed through the Child in Care Process, as any assessments of the child's Transition to their new home will be enhanced by feedback on these contacts.

We regard the number and frequency of contacts to be a 'Gold Standard', and one to aspire to, but they are also an ideal scenario. Accounting for the child needs and capacity, as well as that of the foster carers', and prospective adopters', must also be placed in the mix, an ever-changing movement of settling and nestling. Therefore, it is suggested that the whole transitions planning takes place within a context of planning, doing and reviewing.

What is key throughout the process is that social workers, foster carers and prospective adopters need to justify, in an evidence-based manner, why not, rather than why, when it comes to post-placement contact between a child and their former foster carers.

Fundamentally, these contacts should be viewed as an investment in the child's future stability with their new family.

Furthermore, questions that the prospective adopters need to be asking at this time are "What have we seen, in terms of the child's behaviour, and what do we think it means, for the child?"

Whilst most of the contacts set out below involve face-to-face contact, alternative means of indirect contact using Skype, telephone calls and letters/cards between these contacts, have been evidenced as a useful method for the child to maintain a relationship with their foster carers, and to support the settling process.

### **Contact Schedule**

It is helpful if the following schedule is built into the Transitions Plan, on a case-by-case basis:

Day 1:

Child placed with Adopters

Within first 2 weeks of placing:

Indirect Contact with Foster Carers (telephone, Skype, card, letter)

After 2 weeks and within 4 weeks of placing:

Direct Contact with Foster Carers (Pop-round)

Within 28 days of placing:

1<sup>st</sup> Child in Care Review

4-8 weeks after Pop-round Contact:

Direct Contact with Foster Carers (Assimilation)

Within 3 months of 1<sup>st</sup> Review:

2<sup>nd</sup> Child in Care Review

3-4 months after Assimilation Contact:

3<sup>rd</sup> Direct Contact with Foster Carers (Affirmation)

Within 6 months of 2<sup>nd</sup> Review:

3<sup>rd</sup> Child in Care Review

### **Indirect contact explained**

Devon Adoption workers have found that Skype (especially if used previously around the child whilst in their placement), can be an effective tool to help the child to begin adjusting to their new home, whilst also allowing the adoptive parents to adjust to the idea of maintaining and managing contact.

## **Direct contacts explained**

### **1. Pop-round, catch-up meeting, after two weeks and within four weeks of placing.**

This informal, low-key visit by the foster carers to the child's new home, is an opportunity for the child to understand that they have not been abandoned by their previous carers, and for the foster carers to demonstrate approval and support for move. Such a visit would give the child an opportunity to show them their new home, bedroom etc. After that, a neutral venue between the two homes would be appropriate.

We understand the child may be confused at this initial meeting, particularly about who is 'in charge', but an upset caused by this confusion is likely to be outweighed by the value to the child of the reassurance they will feel at seeing their foster carers, and it is important. Further, any short-term disturbance to the child will not undermine the good work done during the introductions period.

Anecdotally, we know that the child is likely to be unsettled for a few days after this initial meeting. However, we also know that the child will settle again, safer and more trusting of their new parents. Furthermore, while we know that adopters themselves, may feel unsure and insecure and will need support from their adoption social worker, such a meeting affords them an opportunity to glimpse in the here and now something of their child's emotional coping strategies.

### **2. Assimilation contact, four-eight weeks after pop-round contact**

With the underlying concept of promoting the adopters bond to the child and the child's attachment to his new adoptive family firmly in the minds of those working for their benefit, the next meeting is to give the child further reassurance that their former carers have not forgotten them and still hold them in mind.

The idea of the assimilation meeting is that, as the child gradually adapts to their new family circumstances and begins to experience their new care environment, they will be assisted in forming the underpinnings of a more secure attachment by the knowledge and proof that their foster carers still hold them in mind and that they (the child) really mattered to them.

As stated previously, this meeting may again be followed by a period of unsettledness, but again, this would be a normal reaction, and the mantra 'short term pain, long term gain' is best to keep in mind – the gain being the child's knowledge that they are in the minds of their former carers, in a caring manner, and have permission to stay in their new home.

### **3. Affirmation contact, three-four months after assimilation contact**

Affirmation is an opportunity to acknowledge that this is right, and good that overall, the child is settled and happy in their new home.

With this schedule, this meeting is likely to take place just before the granting of the Adoption Order,

By this time, if a relationship between the foster carers and the adopters is a natural one, it is hoped that they will be able to arrange any further meetings themselves, after the granting of the Adoption Order.

If the relationship were less natural, this would be the point where arrangements for some form of future contact could be made, be it regular letterbox, or less regular face-to-face meetings.

Alternatively there could be an acknowledgement that the necessary work has been done, and that the adults will no longer stay in contact, but secure in the knowledge that, together, they have given the child the best opportunity to settle into their new home.

The Consultancy advises that wider family members, if not that significant to the child, should not be included in these three initial meetings.

However, if there are really significant other family members then a decision should be made on a case by case basis about when they should be included, as Adopters can feel overwhelmed by too many visitors of any kind, especially in the early stages.

Foster carers can be encouraged to say things like: “(Foster Carer’s child) sends her love and I will tell her all about your new home and mummy and daddy when I get home”.

## **Appendix 12: Scripts and guidance for contact for foster carers and adopters**

### **Foster carers**

Foster carers must remain mindful that they understand that the reason for contact with a child, after they have been placed with their adoptive families, is to support them to settle.

Prior to the child moving, and in the context of this guidance, foster carers should be encouraged to let children that are due to be placed with Adoptive families, know that they will talk to them again, and see them again.

### **Suggested phrases:**

“After you’ve moved to your growing-up family, you can call me/Skype me to tell me what you’ve been up to....”

“We’ll be seeing you soon, to have a look at your new home, and you can show me your new bedroom, when I come to see you.”

At the first Pop-round contact, foster carers must avoid asking the child to come to them (for example at the front door), and attempting to hug them in order to accommodate their (the foster carers) emotional needs rather than those of the child.

If a child runs to them, and gives them a hug (though this may not happen as they will have been with their new family for up to four weeks by the time this contact takes place), then reciprocal actions are appropriate. It is vital to ensure that the emotional needs of the child are contained at all times.

### **Suggested phrases could include:**

“I wonder if you were a bit confused when you left us...”

“I just wanted to say hi and see how you are doing and make sure you understood that we still care and think about you...”

During the first contact it is likely that the adoptive parents will be nervous and emotional; whilst they will have agreed to this contact, in their minds it is likely that they will be thinking about the possibility that the presence of the foster carers will unsettle the child, rather than settle them. They will also be worried that the child will ignore them and only want to spend time with their former foster carers. All actions must be taken within the context that the aim of the

contact is to support the developing relationship between the child and their adoptive parents.

It is important to bear in mind that the child is likely to respond to the indirect or direct presence of their foster carers with activated behaviour. As the aim of the contacts is to help the child to settle, it is important that foster carers maintain a position of deferring, gently and compassionately, to the adoptive parents during this contact.

During contact time with the child, it is important to ensure that there are affirmations of their new life (home, bedroom, diet, clothing, routines), and both the child and their adoptive parents get the message that the foster carers approve, and therefore give permission for the child to move on.

Emotions are OK during contact, however, it is vital that they are limited to expressions that the child can manage. Whilst a few tears indicate permission and acceptance of emotions, sobbing is likely to confuse and unsettle a child.

**If a child notices that the foster carer is emotional, a suggested phrase could be:**

"I miss you (that's why I have some tears in my eyes), but I am really happy for you, that you are with your 'growing-up' family now, and I can see they love you very much"

If the child begins to say that they wish to return to their foster carers' home, this will be an opportunity to affirm their new parents and home.

**Suggested phrases could include:**

"I guess you're feeling a anxious/upset/worried at the moment, and wonder why you can't come back to our house?"

"This is your new home and (adopters) are doing all they can to help you feel settled here. I/we get that you might feel sad at times, that you don't live with me anymore.

"I do 'looking after' work, and there is another child waiting to be 'looked after' by me."

"I will come and see you again, and we can go out to a (play park or other nearby facility)"

A central question during all contact, indirect and direct, should be:

"Will what I am about to do/say/gesture, help this child to settle, or might it generate anxiety, fear and worry, therefore potentially unsettle the child?"

## **Adopters**

We know that contact is better for children from research, and from what adopted children and adopters have told us.

Experience has shown us that in the long term children benefit greatly from staying in touch with foster carers - they are more settled, trusting and believe in lasting relationships.

The venue for the pop-round contact is the child's new home, as it is the opportunity for the foster carers to show they are in agreement, and give permission for them to move on.

Subsequent contact venues should be neutral and calm; somewhere where everyone can all sit down and talk.

The pop-round contact should be half an hour at most. It is important to prepare the child and talk about the meeting (not too far in advance otherwise they may get too nervous and anxious).

### **Suggested phrases could include:**

"We will be meeting with (foster carers), but you will still be staying here and coming home with us... this is your family"

You can also ask the child if they have any questions they want to ask their foster carers?

### **Keep exploring the meeting afterwards with phrases such as:**

"We were a bit worried that you would not understand that you are not moving on anywhere else... we are your family now etc."

It may be that the child will be wondering why they moved, whether and when they will be moved again, so going over all this again may be really helpful for them. All this confusion that he may be experiencing may mean he feels very unsafe. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the child is not forgotten about by their foster carer, but that they will not move on again

Even though you are saying all the above, we know that actually seeing their former carers, and having it demonstrated physically that they are not going anywhere else, and they are staying with you may be very powerful for them, though it is likely there may be some upset afterwards.

These meetings are likely to be difficult for you, and they may awaken a whole range of emotions in you about being a parent. However, the child needs you to be strong for them.



Your child may run to the foster carers with open arms and may be sad when they leave. You can help them with this and be their important person, who comforts them when they feel sad and who understands them. It is a fantastic chance to bond with your child! And it will help build your relationship with them in the long term.

We fully recognise that it is likely to be upsetting for you, if the child is upset, but actually this is positive, because they are not burying their emotions.

Sometimes children may seem okay at meeting their foster carers but they may be telling you in other ways that they are sad and missing them. They may be withdrawn or quiet, or have a bad tummy ache, or chew things nervously.

Help them explore these feelings, by wondering if they have a bad tummy because they are missing their foster carers etc. Say the words out loud for them and help them with their feelings.

Remember foster carers can sometimes struggle with their feelings too, especially at the first meeting. They will also need support from their social worker. The second visit will be better!

If there are any issues where the contact really does not work, your social worker will support you.

From our experience, staying in touch with your child's foster carers really does work!

If distances are too great, electronic means of communication such as Skype or telephone calls are great ways to stay in touch.

Also drawings, post cards etc. can be used in between the meetings, if they meet the needs of your child. After this, it is up to you to manage; you will know what your child needs and what works best for them. As a minimum, you will need to at least exchange Christmas cards for your child, apart from in exceptional circumstances.

Adopters tell us that there is a range of post-placement contact that takes place. Some foster carers have become godparents or 'aunty and uncle' to the child; other families have regular get-togethers, such as picnics and outings.

What is important is what works for you, and most importantly, your child!