



Contact with parents, relatives and friends

Scope of this policy

This policy explains the arrangements that need to be in place in relation to the contact that children placed with agency foster parents have with parents, anyone with Parental Responsibility who is not a parent, siblings, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child.

This policy is compliant with the [Fostering Services National Minimum Standards](#) and the [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#).

Outcome

Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, half-siblings, wider family, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives.

Underpinning legislation and guidance

- [Fostering Services National Minimum standards](#) (Standard 9: Promoting and Supporting Contact)
- [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#) (Regulation 14: Duty to Promote Contact)
- [The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review](#)

Other relevant policies

Delegated Authority to Foster Parents

1. Contact with parents and siblings

Wherever possible and appropriate, children and young people should be encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their parents and siblings, and parents and siblings should be encouraged to take part in activities organised for their children. Such contacts should be consistent with the child's Care Plan which, itself, must take account of any Child Protection Plan or Contact Order that may be in force. There is a presumption of continued contact between the child and their family while the child is Looked After, unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare.

Contact between children and parents or siblings may only be permitted if previously agreed by the child's social worker and set out in the child's Placement Plan.

It may be useful to encourage young people to share details of how they communicate with others (this may include mobile phones or other social networking sites and apps and consoles such as Xbox or Play Station) and an agreement reached between the young person, social worker and foster parent about how to safely do this.

Both direct and indirect contact arrangements should always be clearly detailed setting out the purpose, how contact will take place, the venue (or type of meeting place), the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed. The use of mobile communication should also be considered.

Contact arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The child's welfare is the paramount consideration at all times and each child's wishes and needs for contact should be individually considered and regularly assessed. The wishes and feelings of the child should be ascertained, wherever possible, using advocacy and communication services if necessary.

So far as it is reasonably practicable, the wishes and feelings of the parents and the child's foster parents must be ascertained before a decision about contact arrangements is made.

Contact arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

Secure Base

The Secure Base Model underpins the therapeutic foster care we ask our foster parents to provide. Sensitive caregiving and secure attachment which are central to Secure Base have strong links to the theory of resilience. The development of resilience allows a child to overcome past adversities and to face future challenges with hope, confidence and competence. For fostered children this may include managing contact with birth relatives or coming to terms with a troubling life story.

2. Contact with significant others

For children in care the term contact is often used more generally to describe the need to maintain a relationship with members of their birth family, but it may also apply to the

child's wider family, previous foster parents or staff from residential settings, former teachers or counsellors, friends from another area where they lived in the past; anyone, in fact, who has played a significant role in his or her life. Without specific attention we know that contact arrangements tend to wither and become less frequent over time, with the result that children leave care isolated and lacking in the support networks that other children and young people take for granted.

It is important to emphasise that the expectations of contact relate not simply to the foster child's immediate family but also other significant relationships.

3. Unsupervised contact

Children may only have unsupervised contact with parents, siblings and agreed significant others with the agreement of the placing authority and where the arrangements for such contact are set out in the Placement Plan.

4. Supervised contact

The decision about the need for supervised contact will be made by the placing authority as part of the assessment and planning process, the reasons should be clearly recorded and the arrangements set out in the child's Placement Plan which will be regularly reviewed as a minimum at the Looked After Review.

The arrangements will include the details about the role of the supervisor, the extent of the supervision required (it may be sufficient to supervise from an adjacent room) and if the visit is confined to a certain identified area, for example a specified contact centre.

We ask the placing authority to complete a detailed Contact Risk Assessment form prior to contact supervised by ISP. The risk assessment includes:

- Any known risk that the parent may abduct the child.
- Behaviour concerns in relation to parents or other adults at the contact session, including known use of alcohol or drugs.
- Concerns about the use of technology during contact.
- Action to mitigate risk, including number of supervisors and venue requirements.

Those supervising such visits should familiarise themselves with the requirements as detailed in the Placement Plan and Contact Risk Assessment, follow the requirements specified and fully record their observations as soon as possible after the contact visit takes place.

5. Foster Parents visiting family homes

If it is likely that foster parents will visit children or supervise them in the family homes, they must consult their supervising social worker beforehand - and a risk assessment should be completed by the placing local authority. Advice should be provided to the foster parents on any risks and strategies they should adopt.

If foster parents are confronted with unacceptable behaviour during the visit, they should attempt to comply with the guidance provided by their supervising social worker, but if they consider that they and/or the child is at significant risk, they should leave, preferably with the child, and contact the child's social worker and their designated supervising social worker. The foster parent will be required to write up a separate report based on their observations and the reasons why they felt it necessary to end the contact.

6. Concerns during contact

Whenever the foster parents and/or the agency's staff are concerned about a child's reaction to contact, this will be communicated to the child's social worker as soon as possible and the discussion will be recorded within the daily log.

Should foster parent or other agency staff have any concerns during contact and consider that immediate action is required, they should take what reasonable steps they can to reduce or prevent any risk - wherever possible this action should be taken by a foster parent after first consulting their supervising social worker or by other agency staff after consulting their line manager. In exceptional circumstances, they should notify the police. The police must be called immediately in the event that the parent attempts to abduct the child.

Emergency restrictions on contact can only be made by the agency to protect the child from significant risk and must be notified to the placing authority (child's social worker) within 24 hours.

7. Restrictions or termination of contact

As stated above, contact should always be agreed with the placing authority and no restrictions on contact* should be made by the foster parent without the agreement of the child's social worker.

In the event of being unable to contact the child's social worker or the social worker's manager the placing authority Duty Team should be contacted.

*The only exception to this is in an emergency situation where the foster parent or a member of staff within the agency reasonably believes that they need to safeguard or promote the welfare of the child; if foster parents take any such action, they must notify their supervising social worker and the child's social worker immediately afterwards.