

CONTACT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN/CHILDREN WHO REQUIRE SUPERVISED CONTACT.

1. PURPOSE

It is only since the Children Act 1989 that contact for looked after children with their birth parents has been formally acknowledged as the right of the child. According to research it promotes the psychological well-being and developmental progress of the child in care and also plays an important role in supporting rehabilitation back into their parents' care. Children perform better, emotionally, socially and educationally where family connections are preserved. There are many advantages to children in maintaining contact with their families, namely:

Children worrying less about their parents and siblings if they see them regularly

Seeing birth parents and family helps with a sense of identity

Less feelings of rejection if the parents want to see them

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to provide contact for Looked after Children or children who require supervised contact with their parents and any other relatives or persons connected with the child.

Section 34 of the Act covers contact for children who are subject to care orders and states that 'reasonable' contact must be offered to the children and their parents (with or without parental responsibility) and any legal guardian, the previous holder of a residence order, and any person who had care of the child by virtue of a High Court Order. The Local Authority has the power to decide what amounts to 'reasonable contact' ensuring that at all times their paramount duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child is taken account of.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Slough Children's Services Trust is committed to promoting positive contact between children and their family. Contacts are facilitated by Contact Workers who will provide full or moderate supervision as requested by the referring Social Worker. They will observe and record the relationship between parents / relatives of the Child/ren.

It is proven by research that contact promotes rehabilitation back into the family home. However, this can be dependent on helping parents to resolve the difficulties that led to the child being accommodated. Rehabilitation requires commitment from parents and professionals alike.

In order to sustain this support, feedback will be given to parents on a six weekly basis in the form of a review meeting.

PROCEDURES

Emergency Placements

Social worker to e-mail a referral and risk assessment to the Contact Team based at Slough Family Contact Centre ([_ContactTeam](#)) with information regarding age of children, address and contact numbers of parents and placement.

It is expected that the contact agreement is to be signed by the social worker with the parent before the first contact takes place. This allows the parent to be clear on the expectations around contact and the contact centres policies.

Interim Contact

Social worker to send referral and risk assessment to the contact team prior to the first court hearing. This will enable a draft plan to be formulated for social worker to present at court. Planning in this way will avoid where possible contacts being re scheduled due to worker availability. Saturday contact will only be offered when parents are unable to attend during the week. Children travelling long distances will also be given priority for weekend contact.

Once the referral is received, the contact team will take responsibility for contacting the foster carers and parents to make arrangements. The contact team will provide a minimum of one session per week dependent on the needs of the child and the plan of the authority.

Before the care plan is written, it is expected that consultation with the contact manager takes place to ensure that contact arrangements are viable.

Contacts which are to take place out of area venues can only go ahead if pre-arranged. If the session is to take place at a venue which is a licensed premises e.g. a restaurant, Bowling Alley, parents are to be reminded of the agreement about the use of alcohol. If at any point on an external contact, the contact worker feels the element of risk is heightened then they will stop the contact and request the session take place elsewhere in the future. Priority is given to contacts that are in court proceedings.

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Transport

There is an expectation that foster carers undertake the transporting of children for contact wherever possible.

Changes to people transporting children should be kept to a minimum where possible to promote continuity and provide reassurance to the children.

Promoting Positive Contact

Parents will be invited to visit the Centre prior to the first contact to meet the manager and to see the venue. Parents and foster carers will be given a timetable of the days, times, venue for future contacts.

The child's welfare will underpin all decisions about contact, and where issues of the child's safety and well-being arise during contact; provision will be made for the contact to be suspended or action taken to seek variation or termination of contact. This will be done in consultation with the social worker and practice manager. Contact will not be reinstated unless a meeting has taken place to discuss the concerns raised. The social worker and the Contact centre manager will invite the parent/family member to attend.

Priority will always be given to Looked after Children having contact with their parents /carers who, in general require close supervision, observation and assessment. It is expected that social workers take responsibility for arranging sibling contacts.

Wherever possible, and where rehabilitation is the preferred option, contacts will be increased to promote the parent / child relationship.

Risk Assessments must be carried out prior to any outside contacts taking place and there is an expectation that contact take place at the centre for a period of six weeks before this is reviewed.

A range of activities are offered to children and parents at each contact. Parents are encouraged to bring in games and toys if they wish to.

Parents are encouraged to bring snacks for the children who are attending after school. The centre do not provide snacks or refreshment, however water is available at all times.

The expectation is that the same staff as far as possible will undertake contact arrangements for individual families; if staff are absent, efforts will be made to cover the session within the contact service. If this is not possible the child's social worker will be approached to either supervise the session or note it has to be cancelled.

Contact sessions that fall on a bank holiday and occur twice a week or less will be paid back either as a full session or divided and added on to other sessions. Due to time and demand at Christmas time, families may be offered a different time than their usual session for that week so that all families get a fair allocation of time.

Contacts will not be paid back for families when:

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- (i) Attending court - unless they only have 1 session per week.
- (ii) Cancellation of contact by parents or non attendance
- (iii) Cancellation due to child's / parents illness
- (iv) Children are on holiday with their foster families

All cases regarding the above will be looked at individually.

If the parents fail to show commitment to attending contact with their child/ren, the plan will be reviewed after one month with a view to either decreasing or suspending the contact. The review will be undertaken with the social worker.

Alterations to contact arrangements by the social worker e.g. times, dates, level of supervision, frequency etc must be discussed with the contact team manager to assess their viability. A contact update form has to be completed and e-mailed to the contact co-ordinator before the changes can take place.

Parents who ask for their contacts together after they have been having separated ones will be given the sessions that have been held by one parent.

Additional changes to information e.g. residing address, telephone numbers, social worker, foster carer etc. will also be communicated by completing contact update form and e-mailing to contact co-ordinator.

It is the responsibility of the contact centre to update and liaise with parents and foster carers so that they are kept fully informed of contact changes.

All cases will have a designated worker who holds responsibility even when there are 2 staff supervising.

Any concerns / issues regarding foster carers must be discussed with their Link Worker and the allocated social worker for the child/young person concerned.

Clare Dormer
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Slough Family Contact Service

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