

Developing a keeping in touch plan

This template provides a step by step approach to embed research evidence into keeping in touch plans for a child. The left hand column sets out the suggested stages of decision making, whilst the right hand column summarises key factors from research that may be relevant to this child and their family. These can be deleted as appropriate. It can be used to support the presentation of care plans for court and reviews. It is designed to be used for children who will be or are adopted and for those in other long term families. Two worked examples are available to demonstrate a plan for when an adoptive family has been identified and when an adoptive family has not yet been identified.

Name of child:

Date:

What is the purpose of keeping in touch?	Who could meet this need?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Use the space on the template below to consider the benefits of keeping in touch with birth relatives and who could help meet each need. > You should adapt this for the child's specific situation, considering all the people in the support network around the child. > You can add, remove, or change points as needed. 	<p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Siblings (include half and step siblings and other children who have shared a household or whom the child regards as a sibling). > Cousins. > Mother. > Father. > Those who have looked after the child some or all the time (including foster carers, childminders, relatives and friends). > Others who love or care about the child and want to support them (including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, neighbours and supportive professionals. This might include people the child has not yet met). > Pets.

What is the purpose of keeping in touch?	Who could meet this need?
Maintain positive relationships, ease the pain of separation and loss.	
Assure the child that they are loved and remembered and that connected people are alive and well.	
Supporting the child's understanding of their life story and to help children ask questions and have conversations with carers/adoptive parents.	
Help the child to understand their identity, family history, culture and religion now or in the future (particularly for Black and ethnic minoritised children).	
Build relationships and/or a potential source of support and connection to wider family in adulthood.	
Give permission to settle in a new family.	
Support reparation and recovery after abuse.	
Provide a reality check, help reduce the risk of secret, unplanned contact.	
Which of these relationships needs to be prioritised at the moment? Revisited longer term?	Siblings/cousins Adults

For Siblings/Cousins	Name
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > For each person identified within the child’s network, consider the strengths and challenges of keeping in touch. > Use the examples shown as a starting point and adapt for the child’s specific situation. > Consider how challenges can be worked with/avoided. > You can use the assessing strengths and worries and the keeping in touch planning tool documents to help you. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Children/young people want to keep in touch. > Visits are activity based; chance to build up good memories. > Carers from similar backgrounds, with similar values. > Families are geographically close or can work flexibly to overcome issues related to geographical distance. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Siblings discourage child from loving or settling in with new family. > Chains of contact present a risk. > Negative patterns re-emerge (e.g. sexualised behaviour/scapegoating). > Sibling cannot yet relinquish parental role. <p>Conclusion</p>
For Connected Adults	Name
<p>Factors relating to the child</p>	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Child placed in infancy. > Absence of major behavioural/mental health problems. > Healthy psycho-social development. > Child has not witnessed/does not imitate violence. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Older child. > Rejected child; lived with several connected adults. > Major behavioural/mental health problems. > Child witnessed violence/imitates violence.

Factors relating to the carers/adopters

Strengths

- > Involved in planning, trained, prepared and supported.
- > Realistic understanding of potential risks and reasons why birth parents could not care for the child.
- > Resolved states of mind in relation to own loss/abuse.
- > Constructive, collaborative approach.
- > Sensitivity, empathy, reflective capacity.
- > Communicative openness – comfortable talking and thinking about the child's connection to birth family.
- > **Adopters** feel empowered to take control of, support and adapt arrangements.
- > **Foster carers** feel involved in keeping in touch plans and understand their contribution.
- > **Kinship carers** feel empowered to adapt arrangements and able to seek support with this.

Challenges:

- > Excluded from planning, unsupported, unprepared, untrained.
- > Unresolved states of mind re own loss/attachment/abuse.
- > Unwilling to work collaboratively, lack of sensitivity, empathy, reflective capacity.
- > Little communicative openness – find it hard to think and talk about child's connection to birth family.
- > **Adopters** feel plans have been imposed on them.
- > **Foster carers** feel ignored or do not understand why their involvement matters.
- > **Kinship carers** are unclear whether or how plans can be reviewed as circumstances change.

Factors relating to connected adults

Strengths

- > Has never been child's primary carer or was not involved in the abuse or neglect of the child.
- > Constructive and collaborative approach.
- > Relatively free of significant personal difficulties (e.g. substance misuse).
- > Accepts harm caused to child, expresses regret/remorse.
- > Reliable and punctual.
- > Can support the child as a member of their adoptive/foster/kinship family.

Challenges

- > Seriously maltreated or traumatised the child in the past (includes exposure to domestic violence).
- > Denies causing harm/shows no remorse/regret.
- > Exposes child to values at odds with the permanent family (e.g. drug use).
- > Significant personal difficulties (e.g. substance misuse).
- > Unreliable or persistently late.
- > Does not accept the child's membership of their adoptive/foster/kinship family.

Factors relating to relationships

Strengths

- > Adults can trust and respect each other, recognising the importance of the other's role in the child's life and the benefits of keeping in touch.
- > Connected adult accepts, supports and affirms new family. They relinquish parenting role in adoption or share it appropriately in line with agreed plan in kinship or fostering. This can change over time.
- > Child trusts their carers/adopters, feels secure in their new family and can trust the adults in their life to work together.
- > Child's existing relationship with connected adult is positive, with good memories, they are not afraid and freely want contact OR they do not yet have a relationship.
- > Interactions during visits are positive and non-abusive.
- > Connected adult does not use contact to undermine/threaten or cause conflict with carers/adopters. They are not afraid or at risk.

Challenges

- > Adults have little trust in each other and do not recognise the other's place and importance in the child's life.
- > Connected adult insists on maintaining role as main carer and discourages child from loving new family.
- > Adopter/carer does not recognise the benefits of keeping in touch, is critical or overwhelmingly angry towards the connected adult.
- > Child feels insecure in permanent family, has little trust in adopters/carers, cannot trust the adults in their life to work together.
- > Child has troubled or traumatic relationship with this adult, has negative memories, is re-traumatised or fearful after visits, does not want contact.
- > Connected adult uses contact to undermine threaten or cause conflict with carers or threatens abduction. They are afraid or at risk.

Conclusion

Provisional Contact Plan – (see examples below)

- > Meet ups supported by adopters/carers/extended family/professionals.
- > Actively facilitated contact to improve relationships and allow the child to ask questions/prepare them for managing this relationship more independently as they become an adult.
- > Contact in the community/family home/activity based/family time centre.
- > Online, telephone or digital contact – works best alongside or as a stepping stone to face-to-face contact and is easier for older children. Security, privacy and confidentiality need addressing, as well as digital poverty/lack of confidence.
- > Letterbox – this can be hard to sustain but useful when face-to-face contact is not possible or as a stepping stone to face-to-face contact. Those involved need support, guidance and help with any literacy issues.

Frequency of contact should be in line with the benefits and purpose of keeping in touch. For example: more frequent for enjoyable contact designed to build or maintain relationships; less frequent for difficult contact for identity purposes or as a reality check. It is also important to allow the child to regain equilibrium between visits and enjoy family life. Sibling contact can be sustained at a relatively high level.

Provisional Support Plan – (see examples below)

- > Setting up meetings between adults outside of visits to the child.
- > Supervision, facilitation, mediation, hands on parenting support, relationship building.
- > Training and support for carers and family time workers.
- > Links to peer support for child and adoptive parents/ carers.
- > Independent emotional support for birth parents from point of removal, recognition of their loss, referral to services (e.g. domestic violence support).
- > Adapted support for parents with learning difficulties.
- > Making adoptive parents central to discussions about keeping in touch/ increasing the involvement of foster carers in meetings and discussions.
- > Including kinship carers in discussions about plans for keeping in touch; providing access information, training, support, mediation, review and professionally facilitated visits when necessary.
- > Involving children and families in drawing up written agreements.
- > Establishing role clarity and expectations (who is Mummy? Who is responsible for checking the child's behaviour?).
- > Emotional and practical support before and after visits for everyone involved.
- > Financial and practical help with travel/outings.
- > Help to take part in special family events (e.g. weddings).
- > Homely, well-equipped venues with access to outside space, open at weekends and in the evenings.
- > Help for families with writing letters and accessing online contact/ help for young people to manage online contact as they get older.
- > Help to trace important people and come to terms with contact that does not happen.
- > Information sharing between visits or when these are paused to keep relationships alive.

Provisional Contact Plan – <i>(see examples below)</i>	Provisional Support Plan – <i>(see examples below)</i>
<p>Duration of planned visits may need to change over time and should be guided by observation of what is enjoyable for the child as well as practicalities such as travel time and family routines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Clarity about decision making process. > Support when siblings are in different local authorities or family types. > Support into adulthood for all care experienced people and their families.
<p>When and how will these plans be reviewed? The suggested options set out the legal basis on which keeping in touch plans can be reviewed under a variety of court orders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > This plan will be reviewed as the child grows up in response to their changing circumstances, needs, feelings, verbally expressed views and responses to keeping in touch. > It will also be reviewed in response to changes in the circumstances, wishes and feelings of the adults and their wider families. > Adopters can adapt the plan, with support from the adoption support team. > If a contact order is attached to the adoption order, birth parents and adopters can apply to the court for this to be varied. > Plans for fostered children will be reviewed at the six-monthly child in care review. If plans cannot be agreed, parents can return the matter to court. > Special guardians can adapt the plan. Review and mediation are available through the kinship carers team. If disagreements cannot be resolved, parents can apply to the court to ask for help in making a new plan.

Click [here](#) to view all of the *Staying in touch: Contact after adoption* resources.

An open access resource hub for practitioners working with individuals to maintain meaningful relationships after adoption.

Author: Polly Baynes, 2024



www.researchinpractice.org.uk



ask@researchinpractice.org.uk



[@researchIP](https://twitter.com/researchIP)

Part of the National Children's Bureau –
Registered charity No. 258825. Registered in
England and Wales No. 952717.

NCB RiP – Registered in England and Wales
No. 15336152.

Registered office: National Children's Bureau,
23 Mentmore Terrace, Hackney, London E8 3PN.
A Company Limited by Guarantee.

www.ncb.org.uk