



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service



GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Working with Birth Parents

3



Contact

1

Transitions and Early Support

2

Adoption Support

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Introduction

Adoption is arguably one of the most drastic of family interventions, as it severs a child's legal ties to their birth family permanently. The decision to pursue adoption, therefore, has to be considered very carefully, and is one of the most complex and difficult aspects of a social worker's role (Featherstone et al, 2018). Adoption is also a step that breaks generations long cycle of dysfunction (Alper, 2019) and the most successful in doing so (Selwyn, 2014). The majority of children are removed through care proceedings with a small percentage being relinquished; however, the principles of working with birth parents are relevant to both.

We know that many birth parents are all too often living with the consequences of the same childhood trauma recognised by adoptive parents in their children, but without access to safety, support and security. Poverty, parental learning difficulty and poor mental health, and birth parents who were themselves care leavers (in Wales: 27% of birth mothers, 19% of birth fathers) (Roberts et al, 2017) are some of the key factors associated with a child's removal from birth family. It therefore essential that adoption is discussed in the context of wider social policy.

Whilst birth parent mental distress may pre date the placement of a child for adoption, the adoption itself causes huge psychological distress (Neil, 2013; Broadhurst & Mason, 2017). The 3rd report in the Born into Care series reveals the scale of the mental health challenge (over half of pregnant mothers reported an existing mental health condition at initial screening and three quarters experienced mental health related G.P. or hospital appointment) and supports Welsh government current policy of investing in mental health perinatal services. The findings also suggest that mental health should be given greater priority in all children's social care pre-birth assessments, and that further work is needed to address maternal substance misuse and smoking during pregnancy. (Griffiths, L.J et al 2020)

Yet research consistently reports a lack of support for birth parents despite consistent evidence of the long-term consequences. (Memarnia et al, 2015). It stands to reason that emotionally fragile people become even more damaged by the removal of their children, and a lack of support compounds the challenges faced of managing profound feelings arising from their loss and threat to their identity as a parent, often with limited resources.

Issues of loss and grief are clear complicating factors in reproductive decision making when a child has been removed, and understanding the impact of complex grief especially with removal at birth, is essential (Griffiths, L.J et al 2020). In Wales, one out of every 4 mothers who record an index episode of care proceedings is at risk of a repeat episode within 8 years, with the highest risk of recurrence in the first 3 years. The mother's age, youngest child's age, family composition and previous legal orders are risk factors that increase the likelihood of recurrence. Mothers who had children placed for adoption or with extended family members have the highest risk of recurrence whilst those whose children remained at home have lowest. (Alrouh and Broadhurst 2020)

This 'crisis of recurrence' (Cox 2017) led directly to the creation of projects such as Reflect (Pause in England) which proactively tries to break the cycle of repeat removals by working intensively with women (and sometimes their partners) to help them address the reasons their children were removed. The human benefits of providing support that can potentially help stop the cycle, stop further children being hurt and coming into the care system, are huge. In addition, at a time when Local Authority resources are increasingly scarce, targeted prevention is a sensible way to strategically manage limited resources.

"Your support is invaluable to me as I can be myself, you advise me on what is the truth and you give it to me straight, you don't treat me with kid gloves. But you are there for me so that I can get upset and cry and you don't judge even when I make a mistake, but most of all you are yourself and we can talk and laugh and sometimes you make me see that there is light at the end of the tunnel!" (birth mother talking about her Reflect worker)

Birth mothers who face the stigma of "spoiled motherhood" leading to shame and exclusion, and multiple problems with daily living raises practical, ethical and legal challenges (Broadhurst and Mason 2013). Whilst the perspective of birth fathers has always been marginal to adoption policy and practice, most consulted report feeling humiliated by the adoption crisis (Clifton, 2012). However, for both groups, supporting people to find alternative ways to manage emotions of shame and guilt can positively influence outcomes for them and for their future relationships with their children. Ensuring that parents get the right help at the right time is essential. This is equally as important and relevant for other significant family members, not only to address their own grief but also as avenues of support for parents.

There has been an increased recognition in adoption of the need for a more therapeutic approach to supporting children and adoptive families but less so in relation to the support needs of birth parents, and with this, the improved contribution they could make in children's lives.

Enshrined in the Adoption and Children Act (2002) and its associated regulations, birth parents are entitled to an assessment of their support needs although there is no statutory duty, once these needs have been assessed, to provide support. Therefore, provision can often be patchy and variable across Local Authorities. *"If there are lessons to be learnt from almost 100 years of adoption policy and practice, it is that birth parents must be included in every stage of the process without being framed in a simplistic, blaming way and as just one more demand on our time and resources."* (Simmonds in Alper 2019).

The status and purpose of this guide

This guide is constructed to build upon the existing legal framework for adoption and adoption support in Wales as set out at the back of the guide. The guide is designed to build upon good practice and develop a pan Wales approach. It is the expectation of the National Adoption Service that the guide will ensure that all those in receipt of adoption or adoption support services in Wales will have access to the same quality of service.

The guide is being drafted at a time where the regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies in Wales are making significant progress in developing adoption and adoption support services. These guides aim to reflect that progress.

The guiding principles for this guide are as follows:

- The experience of birth parents should be viewed in the context of wider social policy
- Particular experiences of black or minority ethnic families should be taken into account with respect for ethnic and cultural heritage
- Approach to support should be trauma informed and acknowledgement should be given to the lifelong distress that follows the removal or relinquishment of a child
- Support for birth parents that is respectful and empathic is beneficial to birth parents, children and adoptive families as well as for any future children they might have
- Support should be targeted to what the parent's needs, start at an early point, and continue for as long as is needed.
- Effective collaborative working between professionals is essential. There needs to be a common goal and understanding of the work being done and emotionally intelligent skills to build and maintain relationships, and understand the perspective of others.

We hope that the principles and good practice enshrined in this guide will confirm the enormous and enduring benefit of early, targeted and ongoing support for birth parents and their family and most critically for their children. The focus of this guide is from Care Proceedings through to post Adoption Order; although gaps have been identified prior to the proceedings stage, they are beyond the remit of this guide. These principles are applicable when working with all significant birth family members, including siblings, who are often separated as a result of adoption. We need to think about the enduring nature of these relationships as the golden thread for children who cannot remain with birth family (Care Inquiry, 2013).

At the heart of all that we do should be the voice of the child:

- I have a right to understand that it is not my fault my birth parents could not look after me
- I have a right to expect any decision making and outcomes to take account of my particular experiences as a black or minority ethnic child and to respect my ethnicity and cultural heritage.
- I have a right to understand why I cannot live with my birth family
- I have a right to understand why I could or could not live with my brothers and sisters
- I have a right to understand why adoption was chosen for me
- I have a right to understand why this particular family was chosen for me
- I have a right to understand why the current 'keeping in touch' (contact) arrangements were made
- I have a right to keep in touch with my birth family if it is helpful and safe for me to do so
- My birth parents will receive support to help them keep in touch (contact) with me where that has been agreed
- I have a right to keep in touch with other people who are important to me for example foster carers where it is helpful and safe for me to do so
- When thinking about what I need professionals will think about the whole of my childhood not just the here and now.

All guides have taken into account the Sibling Alliance call and pledge, the principles of which are embedded in the guides.

See Appendix 1

How this guide works and how users can make the most of it

This guide stands alone. However, it can also be used in conjunction with three other guides. They cover:

- Contact
- Transitions and Early Support
- Post Adoption Support

Each of these guides is set out separately and discretely. However, in order for the practitioner and, in particular, the child's social worker to gain maximum benefit from each guide, they are ordered chronologically and numbered, so that there will be ease of reference for a practitioner to consider. For example, they can look at what needs to be considered at the family finding stage for each of the four guides (1.3, 2.3, 3.3, and 4.3). The following diagram should help to navigate the guide.

See Appendix 2 for full details of professionals this guide is intended for, abbreviations and terminology.

STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
CARE PROCEEDINGS 1	CSW – family meeting. CSW – ensure CAR/B has sufficient information to inform contact plan. CSW – LJW. ASW advice and support to CSW.	CSW to invite ASW to 2nd LAC review. AA will allocate ASW to work with birth family. CSW ensures that there is a detailed chronology, pre birth and up to the present. CSW undertakes LJW. IRO to monitor progress of LJW.	CSW – family meeting should take place if not happened in PLO. CSW ensures birth family understand adoption is one option in planning. CSW makes referral to region for support in adoption planning. ASW provides 'birth parent counselling'. CSW & ASW -referral to Reflect. CSW – LJW.	CSW – identifying child's long term needs in care plan and in CAR/B. ASW attends 2nd LAC review to advise on possible AS needs. ASW – PA's support plan in the PAR.
PLACEMENT ORDER PROCEEDINGS 2	CSW- care plan /CAR/B / plan for S26 and post adoption contact. CSW – plan for sibling contact	CSW- CAR/B forms the basis of the trauma/ nurture timeline. CSW & ASW plan for 'moving on' narrative.	CSW and ASW agree on effective communication with BP's. CSW plans for s26 contact	ASW to provide support to inexperienced CSW in writing the CAR/B. CSW – identifying child's long term support needs in the CAR/B.
FAMILY FINDING 3	CSW – reducing / goodbye contacts under s26 ACA.. CSW – work with child and foster carer to ensure child understands why contact pattern is changing. ASW – to assist with the above.	CSW – updating CAR/B on child's progress. CSW & ASW identify how PA's will meet needs of child during transition and early support needs when looking at range of PAR's. CSW and ASW agree roles and responsibilities for direct work plan.	CSW – keeping parents informed of progress. CSW works with BP's and other BF members of s26 contact plan. CSW – updates CAR/B on basis of any further information from birth family.	CSW – updating CAR/B on child's progress. ASW prepares trauma/ nurture timeline from CAR/B information and identifies possible support needs. AA provides support to the PA's by way of universal adoption support services.

STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
LINKING 4	CSW – updates CAR/B. CSW & ASW – liaising with PA's and testing their commitment to child's identified contact plan. CSW – LJW.	ASW shares CAR'B and trauma timeline with PA's. CSW & ASW visit PA's home. CSW and ASW help PA's to understand needs of this child. PA's and FC's meet to develop relationship before the Understanding the Child Meeting.	CSW – keeps parents informed of progress, supported by ASW. CSW and ASW to plan for meeting between BP's and PA's.	CSW provides PA's with all the information on the child. ASW and CSW hold the 'understanding the child' meeting from which support needs may become apparent. CSW & ASW supporting PA's if application for leave to revoke PO is made.
MATCHING PLANNING 5	CSW & ASW putting together contact component of adoption support plan . CSW – plan for farewell contact. CSW and ASW – plan for meeting between BP's and PA's.	Understanding the Child Meeting takes place. PA's have period of reflection. Further informal contact between PA's and FC's. Direct work with child. CSW, with help from ASW completes APR and ASP. Possible child viewing. Planning for meeting with BP's and PA's.	CSW – keeps parents informed of progress (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications). CSW & ASW to liaise on farewell contact arrangements and support to be offered to BP's.	CSW & ASW look at both child's specific support needs and PA's strengths and vulnerabilities to inform adoption support plan. CSW, with help from ASW, completes APR and ASP which are shared with PA's
MATCHING PANEL / ADM 6	Panel and ADM to consider the proposed contact plan	Panel and ADM to consider matching paperwork and report from the UtCM.	CSW – keeping parents informed (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications). CSW & ASW to consider arrangements for BP and PA meeting.	Panel and ADM to consider whether support plan is fit for purpose and recommend/ approve match
INTRODUCTIONS PLANNING 7	CSW and ASW – Plan for connections with foster carers to be maintained following transitions. Meeting with BP & PA's.	ASW & CSW– allocation of PR agreement. ASW plans introductions planning meeting. Direct work with child.	CSW – keeps parents informed. Meeting with PA's and BP's takes place. Meeting with PA's and other members of BF (eg older siblings) takes place	CSW and ASW involve health and / or education in planning where appropriate
INTRODUCTIONS 8	ASW and FSW to assist FC's and PA's in forging a relationship that will sustain a level of contact.	ASW to lead on three step approach to introductions. Direct work with child. ASW leads review.	CSW – keeping BP's informed of date of introductions (see AFA advice for NAS on revocation of PO applications).	CSW and ASW to amend support plan if additional needs come to light during introductions

STAGE	1 CONTACT	2 TRANSITIONS AND EARLY SUPPORT	3 WORKING WITH PARENTS	4 ADOPTION SUPPORT
PLACEMENT 9	CSW, ASW and FSW to ensure contact with foster carer takes place.	ASW provides continued support. Direct work with child. Contact with FC.	CSW and ASW – PR agreement with PA's.	ASW & CSW will review the support plan if additional needs of the new family emerge
EARLY WEEKS / MONTHS 10	ASW ensures that settling in letter is sent to birth parents and others (within 6 weeks). ASW, CSW and IRO support PA's and BP's in establishing a contact pattern.	CSW – statutory visits and reviews. IRO – reviews. ASW – continued support. Contact with FC's.	ASW & CSW – support PA's to send settling in letter to BP's. IRO to ensure letter has been sent.	CSW – statutory visits. IRO – reviews. ASW – continuing support. All involved providing reassurance that early weeks and months can often be difficult.
DECISION TO APPLY FOR AO 11	ASW & CSW – contact plan and contact support plan in Annex A.	Decision made following review and in consultation with PA's and ASW.	CSW – notice of hearing to parents (regs). ASW and CSW consider support to be given to BP's re hearing.	CSW & ASW support PA's in any application for leave to contest the making of the Adoption Order
AO PROCEEDINGS 12	CSW & ASW to ensure that post adoption contact agreements are understood, committed to and signed	CSW – statutory visits. ASW – continued support.	CSW & ASW complete Annex A. CSW to update CAR/B following final hearing to incorporate judgment.	CSW & ASW to ensure that support plan has been reviewed in anticipation of the Adoption Order being made
POST AO 13	ASW / support team / VAASW support where appropriate and assess and review for adoption support needs relating to contact .	N/A	ASW/ region – commencement of, or continued support with, contact ASW / region – general support to BP's. ASW – continued communication and exchange of information	ASW / regional support where relevant. Post adoption support plan to set out what to be provided to the child and to the family and an agreement for review or 'keeping in touch'

Each section in the guide sets out:

- 1) **The legal framework**, where appropriate, with any **relevant statute set out in red**, **regulations in blue** and **case law and general legal principles in green**. Where there is a reference to the **Adoption and Children Act 2002** or the **Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005**, a full note of the **section** or **regulation** may be found in **Appendix 3**;
- 2) **What needs to happen** to achieve good practice and what must be done by the child's social worker and / or the adoption social worker as well as other professionals involved in the child's plan.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The twin track or multi track care planning process, considering the range of options available for a child's permanency, begins with the pre proceedings process, as set out in the PLO (Public Law Outline, 2014 (Practice Direction 12A Family Procedure Rules 2010)).

A major component of the pre proceedings process is the use of the family group conference, or family meeting, whereby the important adults in the child's life meet to discuss and suggest plans for the child's future if the child is unable to remain with parents. (See below for the use of the FGC in collating information for life journey work, should it be needed in the future).

During the care proceedings themselves, where the multi-track planning includes the possibility of a care plan for adoption, a number of duties arise. These are the responsibility of the child's social worker.

Reg 14(1) Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005: Requirement to provide counselling and information for, and ascertain the wishes and feelings of, the parent or guardian of the child and others.

The matters set out in the regulations have to be considered at the care proceedings stage, as, in all likelihood, the application for a Placement Order will take place straight after the Care Order has been granted under s31 Children Act 1989. A Placement Order, made under s 21 ACA 2002), cannot be made unless the adoption agency has made a 'should (or 'ought to') be placed for adoption' decision (s18 ACA 2002).

It is therefore necessary, during care proceedings and if the care plan might be for adoption, for the CAR/B form to be prepared and for the agency decision maker to make a 'should be placed for adoption' decision under regulation 19 AA(W)R 2005.

The CAR (Child's Adoption Report) is the component of the CAR/B form that satisfies the requirements of regulation 17 AA(W)R 2005 for the agency decision maker. The 'B' component represents the information to be provided that is set out in Annex B at the Placement Order application stage (Part 14 Family Procedure Rules 2010, Practice Direction 14C – Reports by the Adoption Agency or Local Authority).

The adoption agency has a duty to ensure that the child's parents have the information provided as set out in regulation 14. They are helped by the fact that the parent(s) will have automatic entitlement to legal aid and, unless they choose not to, will have full legal representation throughout the care proceedings and subsequent Placement Order proceedings. The parent's legal adviser will explain a great deal of the process to their client, but it remains a duty of the agency (here in the form of the child's social worker), to ensure that the process and implications of the making of an Adoption Order are made clear, through written material and through discussion.

The duty to provide a 'counselling service'. See below

Reg 19(3) AA(W)R 2005: Adoption agency decision and notification (notification to parents)

The decision that the child should be placed for adoption will be considered during the care proceedings and is usually expected to have been made in time for the local authority's final care plan (for adoption) to be filed in time for the Issues Resolutions Hearing (IRH) by Week 20. Even though parents are (or are able to be) legally represented, the parents must be notified separately, with a copy of that letter going to their legal representatives. This is the responsibility of the child's social worker.



WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Birth parents describe care proceedings as adversarial and traumatic and describe a lack of compassion and kindness as well as a lack of communication and information sharing (Alper, 2019). It is often hard for parents who are distressed and frightened to retain information about important things like contact arrangements and whilst there is clear evidence of the consequence of delay for children, the 26 week timescale has been argued as insufficient for birth parents to evidence sustained change (Gupta and Lloyd-Jones 2014; Mason et al 2019).

Balancing the needs of the child and the parent is complex and most social workers would want to see a better balance between support and assessment. Social workers and the court are rightly prioritising the needs of the child in striving to protect them and keep them safe, and making decisions to ensure they can grow up in a family that nurtures them and helps them grow in every sense of the word.

“What I would say to a rookie social worker is – remember these adults were children yesterday, be curious, you have to put the child first but also try to imagine their life, have conversations with them”

Reflect worker



At the time of proceedings, it is sometimes difficult for CSWs, with limited resources and time, to fully consider the needs of the birth parents, just as it is difficult for birth parents to accept support at this time of contention and mistrust. Some of the ways that birth parents manage and express their distress and overwhelming feelings like shock, anger, shame and guilt can be challenging and adds to the disconnect and lack of engagement with any support services that are offered.

Research highlights the benefits of access to independent support from practitioners not involved in decision making and from individuals / agencies that understand their circumstances and the barriers that inhibit engagement. Despite the challenges of engagement, resources and conflicting priorities, effective and sensitive emotional and practical support from an earliest point and for as long as the birth family need it, will have a multitude of benefits (Roberts et al, 2018; Mason et al, 2019; Alper, 2019)

Family Meetings of Family Group Conference (FGC)

At the start of proceedings, it is possible that the child's social worker will have an established working relationship with the birth parents and will therefore be able to gather information about the child and his / her place in the family. However, a family meeting or FGC provide an unique opportunity to explore a number of key areas and gather vital information and should be considered at this point if this has not happened pre proceedings.

Individual Responsibility

- If a family meeting or FGC has not occurred pre proceedings, the CSW will need to instigate this (with support – see service responsibility below) at this stage to enable all key members to be identified. The purpose of this meeting will be multi functional:
 - Get a real sense of how the child fits within this network and their identity as part of it
 - Enable the CSW to further explore potential and realistic options for permanence for the child within this network,
 - Establish what support is available for the birth parents within the extended family and friends network for the immediate, medium and long term
 - Gather information relevant to the CAR/B and the child's Life Journey Work (LJW).

Service Responsibility relating to Family meetings

- Each area to identify a single point of contact (SPOC) for support and assistance in preparing and facilitating a Family meeting or Family Group Conference. Although the CSW should assist in preparation and attend this meeting, they should not hold primary responsibility and should not chair the meeting.

Information sharing, allocation and support

Birth parents may have their own particular needs arising from issues like mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse, learning disabilities, and might have their own allocated social worker from adult services. If there appears to be unmet needs for the adult, the CSW should refer the birth parents to the appropriate adult services team for a Part 3 SSWBA assessment of need and a following Part 4 provision of a Care and Support Plan.

During Care proceedings, birth parents may be referred for assessment purposes to a particular adult team, like learning disabilities. However, the CSW should also be mindful of the support needs as well as the need for assessment during proceedings.

- CSW to ensure that the birth family understand that adoption is one of the options being considered and running parallel with other assessments of family / connected people. CSW will at this stage also need to seek the views of the birth parents on the potential plan for adoption.

“There is nothing more isolating as a parent caught up in the child protection system than sitting in a meeting listening to professionals using language or jargon you don’t understand. You are already frightened, you’re already acutely aware of the power dynamic; it takes the strongest and most confident of us to speak up in front of professionals and confess you don’t have a clue what they’ve said”

birth mother



- Regional adoption teams are available for advice and support on adoption planning including prior to, or at early stage, of care proceedings. Whilst it is acknowledged that each region has its own protocol for accepting referrals this general principle stands.
- When multi-track planning includes the plan for adoption, there needs to be early and proactive contact between the CSW and the regional adoption service at the earliest opportunity.
- Again, it is acknowledged that each region has its own protocol for allocation (in some regions practitioners are from Adoption Support and in others from the Family Finding team), there needs to be some common guiding principles borne in mind in relation to allocation of the Adoption Social worker (ASW):
 - The importance of developing relationships with birth parents and the benefits of continuity of involvement with the same practitioner across the adoption journey

A significant barrier to engagement is birth parents having to navigate multiple agency processes, repeating their story each time, and all whilst dealing with multiple issues of loss, grief and shame. One parent, with a long history of involvement with social services commented, **“I am fed up with being passed on to different people. I’ve had it all my life, why do I need any more?”** (Roberts et al, 2018).

Allocation of the ASW should be guided by the principle that there will be long term involvement with the birth family from this early stage and, if the care plan if for adoption, will continue post Adoption Order.

Consideration needs to be given to transfer of responsibility within regional teams where necessary, to facilitate ongoing involvement post placement and Adoption Order. For example, if the family finding team has been involved with the birth family from referral and undertakes work with them until the child is placed and the Adoption Order is made, there needs to be a protocol agreed for transfer of responsibility to the Adoption Support Team so that there is no gap in service and the birth parent has some sense of continuity.

- maximising independence from the decision making for the child, and direct work with the child and their new family.

Another significant barrier to engagement is practitioners’ connection to adoption.

“I didn’t access support as I wanted support to keep my children not support after they were gone. I couldn’t stick the word adoption so I didn’t want to work with anyone from that area”

birth parent



A level of independence from decision making can mean the ASW is better placed to build a relationship with the birth family in order to:

- be able to offer support and enable them to articulate and manage their feelings of loss and grief, shame and sadness
- Support them to understand the narrative that their child is being helped to understand
- help them to share information that would be of value to the child including medical information and LJW

Refer to **NAS Life Journey Work** online archive.

- ASW will be the key point of contact between adoption agency and child care team.
- CSW and ASW to be clear about respective roles and how information will be shared and the limits of confidentiality.

“I think we should be signing up for the long term with the birth parents – getting involved earlier and helping them with providing information for the life journey books and helping them put together a memory box for themselves. I think we need to acknowledge how painful it is for birth parents and that the impact of adoption is a lifelong thing for them too.”

Social Worker



The role of ASW at this stage:

- is to provide information to birth parents and to find out more about the child / children in question. Explanation should be given to birth parents about the ASW role as independent to the CSW and the assessing social worker for the adopters. This should be reiterated and explained in any subsequent individual meetings / contact with birth parents.
- will be to provide “birth parent counselling” in line with Reg 14 AA(W) 2015 to explain the procedure and legal implications of the adoption process and to ascertain birth parents wishes and feelings on a range of issues. This includes where consent is given by birth parents for a child to be placed for adoption, and when it is not given. This report is included in ADM pack for consideration of “ought to be placed” decision.
- to provide written information, including a complaints leaflet to the birth parents and support to ensure they understand the content. This information should be available in other accessible formats e.g. digital and audio.
- to complete a birth parent assessment of support needs and a support plan if support needs identified. This plan should be reviewed by the ASW throughout the adoption process and at regular intervals post Adoption Order.

Acknowledgement and accommodation should be given by CSW and ASW that birth parents might not be able to engage at this point for a variety of reasons, rather than framing a blaming narrative like “hard to reach”, “difficult to engage” which lays responsibility at the birth parents’ door.

- CSW and ASW should offer repeated opportunities to meet with birth parents and be flexible in their approach to gathering and sharing information.

“Some people... the minute their kids are taken off them they get traumatised straight away through the court process... I mean going through court, we had no (emotional) support whatsoever... there was none”

Parent. Roberts et al, 2018



All practitioners need to recognise that birth parents face a host of practical issues post removal in addition to the complex emotional and psychological challenges. These include loss of welfare and housing benefits which lead to crisis and day to day stress (Broadhurst and Mason 2017) and are compounded for birth parents who might be struggling with immigration issues.

“They basically ripped the hell out of me in court. I felt like... a small jelly bean, literally the way they made me feel”

birth father. Roberts et al, 2018

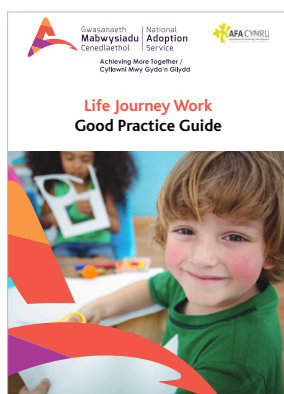


Angrily opposed and demoralised fathers found themselves distanced from their children (Clifton 2012) and further disenfranchised by the court process. They are often overlooked, sometimes because of their identification as perpetrators.

- Both CSW and ASW will make concerted effort to engage with birth fathers in seeking and sharing information and support.

A trauma informed approach with all birth parents which involves thinking widely about barriers to accessing support, including relationships with services, fears of others finding out, being judged as well as specific issues faced by black and minority ethnic parents can really help to identify positive approaches that take account of where people are.

- Both CSW and ASW to adopt a trauma informed approach to birth family engagement



Consent to adoption

- If a birth parent has consented to adoption, the CSW will be allocated immediately and meet with both parents along with the ASW to ensure that they understand what adoption involves and are willingly agreeing to this.

Refer to **NAS and Cafcass Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies** and **Cafcass Cymru: Children relinquished for adoption.**

Life Journey Work (LJW)

The principles of a child knowing and understanding their past is central to adoption practice. The benefits for the child of actively involving the birth parents means that personal information known only to them can be gathered, and can significantly contribute to the child’s knowledge of their background and their identity as part of their birth family as well as their adoptive family (Meakings et al 2018). This can also lay foundations should direct contact be established in the future.

The benefits for the birth family of active participation in LJW is that they feel they have a say in what their child will know about them and an opportunity to express their wishes for the child’s future. It also provides an opportunity for parents to reflect.

“We had a whole box of precious things that the birth mum had kept... wrist tag from the hospital, their first babygro, the little clip from their bellybutton, a photo with their little cousin... so many precious things...”

adoptive mum



- CSW with assistance or advice from ASW if necessary must explain the purpose of Life Journey work to birth parents and other family members and actively involve them in contributing to LJW from the point at which the child becomes looked after in order to capture information known only to them. In all circumstances, account must be taken to each birth family members’ own vulnerability

For Life Journey Work resources, refer to **NAS Life Journey Work online archive** for birth parents and child care practitioners working with birth parents

- CSW to routinely engage extended family members in the gathering of information as they have so much relevant and rich information to share.
- CSW to ensure that there is a system in place to capture Information relevant to LJW which is disclosed during contact sessions, or unstructured activities like car journeys. Recording pro formas should prompt this.

See **Appendix 4** for Key Performance Measures relating to Life Journey Work and information on the different Life Journey books that are created for the child.

These expectations could well be in conflict with the ability of the birth parents to provide information during and following painful proceedings and placement of a child. CSW have considerable workload pressure at this point and often have a strained relationship with birth parents.

Therefore, careful consideration should be given to timing of this work as well as who gathers information, and a flexible approach should always be adopted. Gathering of information is a dynamic process and sits at all stages of the adoption process and post adoption period with responsibility shifting between CSW and ASW and often the Reflect worker if they are involved. Clear expectations with regard to this should be agreed at an early stage between practitioners involved.

- CSW, ASW or Reflect worker to support and encourage birth parents to write a narrative of their own, including their memories of the child, which can be included in the Life Journey book. This can provide reassurance to them that their child will know about them. Clear expectations with regard to this should be agreed at an early stage between practitioners involved.

“It would be good if parents could receive a copy of the life story work even if it’s only digital so they can add to it via the adoption agency ie births, marriages etc or correct any information that’s not right”

birth mother



CAR/B

- It is the responsibility of the CSW to complete the CAR/B with contributions from significant others, including the police, health visitor, medical officer, foster carer and from a review of current and historical records. The CAR/B is the main source of information for decision making and matching and also for the child to access as an adult.

Whilst there may be tensions between the CSW and birth family, it is important that the relationship is maintained and information gathered from the birth family is such that would be important to the child in the future. Good detail is essential, for example about siblings and extended family who are important to the child and about likes and interests.

“The information you get from the CAR/B is so important as the years go by as your child asks more questions. The real detail about what their birth parents were like, their personality and their own childhood experiences, their interests.....this really helped our talks over the years”

adoptive parent



- CSW to gather relevant medical information on birth parents and complete PH Health of birth parents with consent form, and Obstetric forms (birth mother). If CSW has been unsuccessful, ASW to attempt to complete; completed forms are to be sent to CSW and Agency Medical Advisor.
- The benefits of relational based, practical independent support via assertive outreach immediately after the removal is evidenced (Broadhurst & Mason, 2019).

IRO and Reviews

- The IRO in Child Looked after review do monitor this work and ensure information is being collected during this period that will inform the life journey work and ensure that birth families are involved where possible.

Other Service Responsibilities

- It should be acknowledged that counselling services provided within the adoption regulations will not amount to proper therapeutic counselling. Although counselling services can be obtained via Community resources eg G.P., the generic approach of such does not necessary provide a service with an understanding of complex trauma nor is able to offer specific help in relation to the loss of a child.

Consideration should be given to the provision of a therapeutic service for birth parents that operates within a trauma informed framework.

- Local Authorities in Wales have a good record of commissioning / referring to independent support services but are less successful in monitoring their outcomes. This is essential in order to make best use of scarce resources and enable targeted services to be supported or developed.

Effective evaluation will identify key area priorities and the potential for broader service development and availability.

The following link contains online resources for services looking to plan and develop services for working with recurrent care experiences birth mothers
<https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/working-with-recurrent-care-experienced-birth-mothers-online-resources/>



REFLECT

The primary aim of the Reflect service is to prevent repeat pregnancies in the short term, where there has been little time for positive change and successive child removal remains the most likely outcome (Roberts et al, 2018). In achieving this aim, the services also address a range of other key issues facing birth parents eg housing and welfare, poor self esteem and confidence, and can help birth parents overcome or at least accept the huge impact that trauma has had on them and their families. This support can help them to make better choices, address historical and/or current issues and concerns, and create alternative futures for themselves. (Cossar & Neil 2010. Broadhurst & Mason 2013)

“We have no set “programme” but, where appropriate, offer support in such areas as working with professionals, understanding and managing their anger, techniques to help with anxiety, self esteem, introduce them to local services... we can help with housing issues and budgeting but may refer on to specialist services”

Reflect worker

Reflect also has a diverse community outreach approach to reach as many women as possible who would not agree to a referral via the CSW or ASW.

Referral to Reflect

Depending on the relationship with the birth parents, agreement should be reached between CSW and ASW about talking to them about Reflect. Either the CSW or ASW must ensure that a referral is made to the local Reflect project at earliest opportunity with birth parents' consent. Whilst there are different Reflect service models across Wales, with some being provided by external providers and some in house, this will not be a barrier to a consistent approach to referral at an early stage.

Refer to the link below to view the video produced by Cardiff University on CASCADE's evaluation of the Reflect Service in Gwent

<https://vimeo.com/296262119/e85abce099>

“when we are in court, fighting for our children, we're not listening to anyone”

quote from birth mother

“just imagine a Solar system where the birth parent lives on Earth, the Police on Jupiter, Housing on Mars, Social workers on Saturn etc... you are expecting women who are already struggling to make sense of every single planet... how can they possibly be expected to do this?”

Reflect worker

Referrals are accepted both pre and during proceedings depending on the area provision across Wales.

“If court proceedings are live, then we support them through that, explaining the process and terminology as well as offering emotional support throughout. We sit next to them in court, accompany them to legal appointments and meetings with social services such as LAC reviews”

Reflect worker

“What is important is the ‘window of opportunity’ – when a person is ready. The earlier we get in the better”

Reflect worker

Acceptance of referrals are based on following priorities: over 16, under 24; care leaver; high risk of repeat pregnancies; one or more children removed (Broadhurst & Mason, 2017) but also depends on area priorities. Referrals can be accepted outside these key priority areas if there is capacity within the service.

- CSW to ensure that support is available to the birth parents from their own network and / their Reflect practitioner.
- CSW and Reflect worker should be clear about respective roles and how information will be shared and the limits of confidentiality.

Service Responsibilities

- Each local authority area needs to have a combination approach to regularly sharing information about Reflect eg. a single point of contact (SPOC) for Reflect referrals and regular arrangements to disseminate information about Reflect across child social work and adoption teams.

“It's not always clear how the Reflect worker becomes involved; where she is involved, her support”

Social worker

“parents might not be in the right place. Why would they admit they messed up?”

Reflect worker

Despite barriers, birth parents do take up services when the right ones are offered by the right agencies at the right time. Not all birth relatives would want or recognise the need for support but learning from agencies that provide support, and from parents themselves, can lead to the development of more effective services.

- Each area should ensure that their service agenda includes work with child social workers and adoption teams to help them further understand the birth parent position.

Placement Order Proceedings

3.2

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

See the legal framework set out above for care proceedings, as it includes relevant information for Placement Order proceedings.

At the Placement Order hearing the local authority will put forward the contact plans for the duration of the Placement Order. Cross reference with 3.2 in the contact guide

Following the making of the Placement Order, a letter should go out to parents giving them information on their right to appeal the making of the Placement Order and their right to apply for leave to make an application for revocation of the Placement Order, under s24 ACA 2002. This forms part of the advice provided in the NAS/ AFA Cymru advice note on 'Applications for Revocations of Placement Orders'. The advice ensures compliance with case law concerning the circumstances under which applications for a revocation of the Placement Order is made.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

A Placement Order gives the legal authority to place a child for adoption, and cannot be granted unless clear criteria are satisfied and agreed by the court that the child cannot remain with birth parents and the only option is adoption, or the birth parents give consent. The criteria that the court considers are the same as when making a Care Order.

There are many critical turning points in the process of adoption, and this is one of them. Whilst the child's future welfare has been safeguarded, we need to carefully consider the ongoing support and involvement of the birth family both in terms of preventing future children being harmed and also as they will continue to have a role in the child's life.

Information sharing and Support

- The CSW must liaise with the ASW on the making of the Placement Order.

There needs to be effective communication with birth parents following Placement Order and agreement between the regional collaborative and individual local authority about who has responsibility for this.

- A letter should be sent to both birth parents, following the making of the Placement Order, giving information on their right to appeal the making of the Placement Order and then their right to apply for leave to make an application for revocation of the Placement Order. The responsibility for this needs to be clear within each region and child's local authority, and individuals take responsibility as agreed. See AFA advice commissioned by NAS on applications for revocation of Placement Orders.
- At this stage ASW need to offer a further session of "birth parent counselling" to talk through the reasons why the child is being placed for adoption and help with any unanswered questions, including longer term implications (including contact), and timescales.

Further information to be gathered includes birth parents' specific wishes and feelings; information relevant to the child's LJW, including completion of medical information if not already received.

It is critical that birth parents have access to support in order to be able to make sense of what has happened, to help them understand and begin to accept their circumstances.

- If parents previously consented to referral to Reflect, CSW to confirm status of this referral with Reflect service and any potential engagement. If a referral has not been made, CSW to make further attempts to gain consent and make referral if given. If consent is not given, there is potential for Reflect engagement through community resources eg GP

This is a particularly vulnerable time for birth parents as the reality of permanent removal of their child is assimilated. Social stigma arising from societal belief that they brought the situation on themselves and which therefore renders their grief as illegitimate is prevalent. It affects all aspects of their life and across all their relationships – with family, neighbours, friends and new people they meet. Shame and the fear of being judged leads to isolation and a loss of self confidence. Women find themselves in repeated patterns of abusive relationships, unhealthy patterns of coping or seek solace in further pregnancy. (Alper 2019)

- At this point as at any other, it is important for the CSW and the ASW to listen to what parents say they value and find helpful.

“Parents tell us that having the emotional and practical support is the most helpful. Having someone to turn to talk about how they are struggling to come to terms with what is happening is something that they value. Also the practical support with helping them sort out benefits and any arrears they might have along with getting them appointments that support their wellbeing”

Reflect worker

- Both CSW and ASW to offer a number of opportunities for the birth parent to meet which takes into account where they are emotionally, and their ability to assimilate information and make informed decisions.

“they need to be given a bit of time to recover, we can’t just expect them to move onto the next thing just because it’s on our agenda... but obviously we do also need to be mindful of the child”

social worker



Contact planning

- CSW to formulate a comprehensive contact plan appropriate to the child and taking into consideration birth parents, siblings and other significant family members. This will cover arrangements immediately following Placement Order, leading up to and following placement with an adoptive family, and post Adoption Order. It is important that the CSW to base any decisions on the long term needs of the child and consider contact in widest form and over time in doing so.

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide.

“I wasn’t involved in any contact plan.....I was also given written information when it was too late. This would be a letter handed to me from the contact centre to say they was reducing contact. There was never really any conversations about it or meets to give me information”

birth mother

Farewell Contact

- Although a Farewell contact is not able to take place until after the match has been agreed, ASW and CSW need to potentially discuss arrangements for Farewell Contact at this stage depending on timescales. These arrangements need to be discussed with birth parentst; CSW and ASW to agree responsibility for this. Consideration should be given to a range of factors.

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide



THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Parents have the right to apply for leave to make an application for revocation of the Placement Order, under s24 ACA 2002. Practitioners should abide by the principles set out in the case law and reflected in the NAS / AFA Cymru advice on 'Applications for Revocations of Placement Orders. Parents should be kept informed about the progress of family finding, post Placement Order.

"a child should not have first and middle names changed ... it is not fair on the child... and it is highly disrespectful to the birth parent when they gave their children a name they wanted."

birth mother



WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

When trying to understand more fully the needs of the child and their family the Team around the child need to apply 'radical empathy' (Mason et al, 2019) i.e. trying to understand why it was difficult for the parent to care for the child. A compassionate re-appraisal of parent's shortcomings can help children to think about their parents in a more positive light and assist children in managing their dual identity positively.

- CSW needs to ensure that the child's information is accurate, kept up to date and includes sufficient and meaningful information about the birth family, circumstances that led to a plan for adoption and actions taken.
- ASW must continue to offer ongoing support and guidance to the CSW, including ongoing LJW and preparation work with the child.
- A sensitive and empathetic approach to involving parents in family finding should be taken seeking and recording views around cultural heritage, language and identity. ASW to seek and record views of birth parents. Discussion should also include arrangements for a final contact with the child.
- CSW to ensure birth parents are kept informed of plans to identify and match with prospective adopters.

IRO and Reviews

The IRO will continue to monitor and review the work and have a responsibility to seek the birth parents' views about the plan.

Service Responsibilities

- **Adoption team:** Preparation and assessment of all prospective adopters should include the importance of understanding a child's heritage and identity, and their innate connection to their birth family. A trauma informed approach to examining and explaining birth parents' history as well as a child's can enable adopters to develop empathy for birth parents which in turn help in the life journey telling.



3.4

Linking

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As above, parents should be kept up to date with the process of family finding.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

“Two steps forward, one step back... you think this is happening ... and then another crisis happens”

Reflect worker. Roberts et al, 2018



The process of supporting women to a position where they can think about future goals requires patience and skill and is not a linear process (Roberts et al, 2018). Anecdotal evidence from birth parents about the approach to offering support should be considered and taken into account when offering services from any quarter.

“... the way we don't give up and are persistent in reaching out to support them (is helpful). We recognise that parents sometimes aren't ready to engage so we operate a keeping in touch system where we write to them or text them every two weeks initially then a month just to check in and remind them that we are here to support them when they feel ready.”

Reflect worker



- CSW must ensure birth parents are kept informed of plans to identify and match with prospective adopters. This support will be augmented by ASW by offering further sessions of engagement.
- CSW and ASW to give consideration in consultation with all parties to the birth parents meeting with the prospective adopters.

Refer to NAS **Contact Good Practice Guide**

3.5

Matching Planning

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

See the NAS/ AFA Cymru advice note (as above). Once a placement has been identified, a meeting should take place with parents to inform them that, unless they issue an application under s24(2) for leave to revoke the Placement Order by a certain date, the agency will proceed with the matching panel and ADM decision. For more detail see the advice note as above.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Independent involvement with birth parents during this time identify that parents often feel in a state of limbo whilst waiting for adoption placements to be identified. They continue to adjust to their child being removed and the uncertainty and confusion in terms of their relationship with the child and their own identity.

Birth parents hold onto the hope that they can get the child back and often show a fractured understanding of information they have been given, thinking that they can only contest the adoption three months after a child has been placed with prospective adopters. (Roberts et al, 2018). Whilst this hope is comprehensible, support that enables the birth parents to also be realistic in their expectations is needed.

- Birth parents should be kept informed of any progress regarding planning for the child. The responsibility for this needs to be clear within each region and child's local authority, and individuals take responsibility as agreed.

See AFA advice commissioned by NAS on **applications for revocation of Placement Orders**.

- Agreed individual to meet with the birth parents followed by written confirmation of discussion which details the following areas:
 - Provides the date of the matching panel and urges parents to seek legal advice
 - Gives 21 days' notice of the agency's intention to go to matching panel /ADM and to place the child
 - Every effort should be made to ensure that birth parents understand this information and urged to seek legal advice.
- Regular communication between CSW and ASW should be prioritised.

Farewell contact with birth parents

Although Farewell contact is not able to take place until after the match has been agreed, planning for this needs to take priority at this stage.

“How can anything help you say goodbye to your kids. You want to die, it is the worst pain.”

birth parent

“I had a goodbye contact with all three of my boys although I found it very difficult and upsetting to say goodbye to my children, I was grateful that I had the chance to see their faces and spend some time with them one last time until they are at an age to request to see me.”

birth parent



- ASW and CSW to liaise and think about timing and arrangements for final contact; these will need to be confirmed following matching decision.
- Farewell Contact should take account of practical arrangements like whether separate sessions should be arranged for each parent, how the birth parent will get to and from the venue, who will be supervising the session and whether there will be a planned activity, who will arrive/ leave first, agreement regarding exchange of gifts and photographs.

“Unless goodbye contact is well prepared and done in a way that includes the birth parents as well as being mindful of the child’s needs, it causes bumps along the way... it’s unfinished business”

social worker



- Careful consideration should be given to the emotional needs and fragility of the birth parents. ASW or CSW depending on relationship, needs to meet with birth parents and discuss timing and arrangements for final contact, and help the birth parents focus on the needs of the child; having a plan in place and rehearsing what will be happening can help.

“Having advice from the independent social worker (helped) as I didn’t feel judged. This helped me know what I could and couldn’t do, ideas for what to say, practicing it...”

birth mother

“When I did a goodbye contact I had to remember I couldn’t let my son see me really upset and in a different frame of mind. The mind I set for myself while doing goodbye contact was to make sure I was okay even though I knew it was going to be the last time I saw my son. I broke down after he left in the privacy of my family!”

birth mother

It must be so hard for them (birth parents)... I say to them “this is your time and I want you to have good memories and take some memories with you”... when you create that nice space and the children walk in and are happy, this infects the atmosphere... the child wants to engage and the parent does too.”

social worker



Refer to **Appendix 6** In **NAS Contact Good Practice Guide**: Reflect involvement in Farewell Contact

- ASW to seek views on whether prospective adopters would be willing to notify birth parents in the event of serious illness or death of child.
- If no application from birth parent to revoke the Placement Order is forthcoming, proceed to matching panel recommendation and ADM decision.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Adoption agency's decision in relation to the proposed placement

34 (4) As soon as possible after making its decision (I.e. matching panel / ADM, the agency must notify in writing –

- (a) the parent or guardian, if their whereabouts are known to the agency; and
 - (b) where regulation 14(2) applies (where the father does not have parental responsibility but is known to the agency), the father of the child,
- of its decision

Parents continue to have the right to apply for leave to make an application for revocation of the Placement Order. For detail of what and when information should be provided to the parent, see details of the advice.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Letter to be sent to birth parent setting out the expected date of placement, again urging them to seek legal advice if the intention is to make an application for leave, and a plea to inform the agency immediately if this is the intention. A short timescale should be provided (this is the second time that notice has been given). Each region and child's local authority needs to be clear about who takes on this responsibility.

See AFA advice commissioned by NAS on **applications for revocation of Placement Orders**.



THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As above, see the NAS/AFA Cymru advice on Applications for Revocations of Placement Orders.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Refer to NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide.

- It is best practice to promote birth parents meeting the prospective adopters. This should be standard practice unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide

- CSW and ASW to prioritise consideration and arrangements at this stage. Responsibility for facilitating this meeting should be agreed; this is usually by the social worker who knows both birth parents and prospective adopters with support and advice. The meeting should be carefully planned with consideration given to the timing, venue and length of the meeting as well as who will be there. Both the birth parents and adopters need to be well supported before, during and after the meeting.

“It was helpful to know who they’re going to. It reassured me.”

birth parent

A well planned, sensitively managed meeting between parents and prospective adopters can and does lay the foundations of a positive lifelong relationship, the most successful of which continue without professional support. (Neil at al, 2010)

It will be of long term benefit to the child, in terms of them understanding that their adoptive parents know and accept their history. It also allows the birth parents an opportunity to acknowledge the adoption, and for both sides to acknowledge their connection through the child.

It can be helpful for questions to be prepared beforehand by the prospective adopters and birth parents with support identified. Sydney and Price (2014) suggest some messages that prospective adopters could give to the birth family that are evidence of communicative openness and could assist contact in the future.

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide.

“I didn’t meet the prospective adopters. I was supposed to but the date kept getting changed and then in the end I was told I couldn’t meet them. I prepared myself for meeting them for a good few months. In my opinion I think it would have helped me to meet them because then I would know what kind of people my son was going to. I also believe it would have helped the prospective adopters to know me a little bit better picture of who I am instead of reading it or hearing it from someone else.”

birth mother

“I was hoping she would come back so I bought her some new clothes, but I think I’d better give them to you now”

birth mother to adoptive mother during meeting

It can also help to understand information about the child and birth family that would have been difficult to capture in written documents like the child’s CAR/B. Things like choosing a name, “firsts” – memories and developmental – as these are often the questions that children ask and delight in knowing.

“I could tell them that he likes fish fingers and he likes them crispy on the outside”

birth mother speaking to their support worker about the meeting with adopters

Introductions

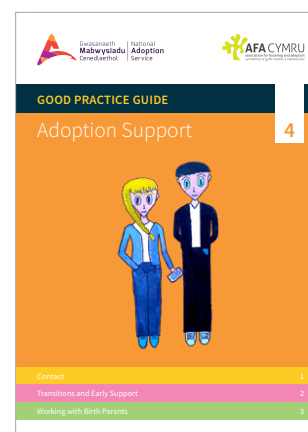
“I did a Farewell contact with a grandmother who was caring for her older grandchild, and the memories of that will stay with me forever... there was genuine warmth between the grandmother and adopters, Mum and grandmother cried together and hugged, So much rich information was shared at that meeting and I genuinely think it set the scene for the ongoing positive connection they still have today”

social worker

- Consideration needs to be given to other family members eg grandparents meeting with prospective adopters.
- Not all birth parents will feel ready to meet prospective adopters at this stage as they may not be able to accept the reality of the adoption. If this is the case, attempts to arrange the meeting at a later date should be made, it is possible for this to happen after the Adoption Order is granted, for example. In addition, consideration should be given to alternative methods of communication, like a digital meeting if the birth parents are more comfortable with this.
- If an existing and positive relationship between the parents and the foster carers exists this should be promoted. Both parties are likely to be experiencing grief and loss and may be able to offer mutual support at this difficult time. If appropriate and all parties in agreement, CSW and SSW to facilitate this.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Birth parents will have been notified and introductions agreed to proceed.



THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Parents and parental responsibility upon placement:

Adoption and Children Act 2002

S25 (4) The agency may determine that the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or of prospective adopters, is to be restricted to the extent specified in the determination.

Parents retain what is often described as ‘residual’ parental responsibility during the period of the Placement Order.

The ‘determination’ referred to above is a written agreement made with prospective adoptive parents, setting out the remit of parental responsibility that the agency is allowing them to exercise. It also sets out in the agreement the limited remit that the parent has for exercising their PR.

The child’s social worker should ensure that parents are clear on the exercise of PR once the placement has taken place.

Cross reference PR agreement in Transitions guide

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Following placement, CSW to meet with birth parents and provide written information to birth parents to explain the remit of their parental responsibility.

Refer to **Appendix 6** in **NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide**: Delegation of Parental responsibility checklist

After a child has been placed for adoption, the majority of time following contested court proceedings, it is all too easy to solely focus on the positive outcome for the child and their future in their new family. Whilst there are inevitable and irrefutable benefits, we also have to keep in mind the birth family who are left facing a very different future.

“One mum really liked sewing so we used some monies we had to buy her a new sewing machine as hers had broken. She made a quilt for her baby who has recently been adopted and is now making clothes for her other two children in foster carer”

Reflect worker

“Parents are often fighting tooth and nail to get this instigated”

Reflect worker talking about letterbox



Alper (2019) highlights some specific support that birth family might value, and some of these are identified as key focus areas by Reflect. However, all practitioners involved should hold these in mind when planning and undertaking work with birth family whilst also recognising that all support needs to be individual based and that one model or way of working cannot be generically applied.

Birth parents in particular, but also siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles etc are uncertain about their role now and often feel they have no guidance. They need help to adjust and manage things like anniversaries and other dates that might be difficult, and also practical and emotional help in establishing and managing ongoing contact, in whatever form.

- CSW to finalise plan for contact and liaise with ASW in getting this instigated. Arrangements and expectations should be clearly set out and birth parents should be supported by ASW to understand their involvement and answer any questions.

Refer to **NAS Contact Good Practice Guide**.

“People often felt they were being ostracized by their local community as their children had been adopted, they didn’t know how to handle this.... it helped to talk about how they felt”

Adoption Social Worker



Birth parents need help in responding to others who blame and judge, support to help them process their loss and grief and healthy strategies to employ when emotions inevitably become overwhelming.

Meeting others in similar situations can help and be a practical way to build self esteem and confidence, and lessen social isolation and stigma (Mason et al 2019). They can also provide opportunities for family members to reflect and understand what has happened which can lead to more empathic responses and support.

“I wanted to stop....(but) I actually done it for myself, instead of relying on other people to do it”

birth parent reflecting on group walk up Penylan organised by Reflect. Roberts et al, 2018

“At the charity shop, they know I have children but they don’t know they don’t live with me because I can’t bring myself...I have to leave at three o’clock because its school time”

birth parent



This event gave women and their partners the opportunity to meet with other parents and be involved in a challenging but rewarding experience. (Roberts et al, 2018)

Whilst there is evidence of a support group network across Wales for family members who continue to care for children, there are scarce options of support groups for birth family whose children have been removed. (Roberts et al, 2018). One group that was running in Carmarthenshire struggled with keeping the group running because of lack of attendees but many who did attend built a positive relationship with the coordinator who they felt was trying to help and support them.

“the relationship we developed in this group led to one mum sharing information and baby photos when her little girl was a few days old with the adoptive parents – they didn’t agree to share this before. The adoptive parents were delighted, and the birth parents were touched by the lovely letter and response from the adoptive parents, tearful and grateful for support and someone listening to them and not being judgemental”

Adoption Social Worker



“By helping adopters understand the birth family’s experience, it will assist them to develop empathy.”

Regional adoption social worker



“Parents in the group we set up have now told others who have children adopted – to contact the adoption team as they will help them and do care about what birth parents feel”

Adoption Social Worker



Helping people rebuild their life by offering practical assistance with things like housing, benefits, access to education or employment and social activities all help in the development of hope for their future.

- ASW to liaise with Reflect worker if involved.
- ASW or Reflect worker to signpost to Family Rights Group, an organisation that provides advice and information to birth families in England and Wales and facilitate online forums for birth parents.

“We can talk about it together; my Mum still gets upset but it’s a shared experience”

birth mother on the importance of family support in coming to terms with loss



Parents should be encouraged to use their own existing social support networks that will include family and friends as introducing too many new people could be overwhelming.

Service responsibilities

- At this stage Adoption Agencies should be thinking about the longer term needs of birth parents and should undertake a mapping exercise of support available in each local authority including the voluntary and 3rd sector and health organisations who provide informal support to birth parents e.g. MIND, Women’s Aid.
- Regional Adoption Teams to co produce local support groups with and for birth family members. These should take account of specific needs of birth mothers and fathers, grandparents including those from black and minority ethnic communities.
- A positive consequence of a support group could well be the development of parent mentors

Co-production in improving services is widely recognised as valuable and beneficial to the individual and wider group.

- Consideration should be given to co production in the wider context as well, involving birth parents in areas of preparation training for adopters and as adoption panel members.

“I’ve been there, I know what it feels like... helping other people like me has given me purpose... I feel better about myself... I can tell people what works and what doesn’t help at all”

birth mother



Early Weeks and Months

3.10

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

It is unlikely that any s26 contact order will have been made but it should be adhered to. Any agreement made, for example the provision of a settling in letter and the beginning of indirect contact, should be adhered to. Cross reference the contact guide.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- ASW and CSW to support Prospective Adopters to send a settling in letter to Birth Parents early on in the placement. There is evidence that this encourages ongoing letterbox contact in the future.

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide.

- CSW, ASW, Reflect worker to continue to encourage birth parents and extended family members to contribute to LJW of they are able to. There should be no end to the gathering of this information.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should quality assure the Life Journey Work and the later life letter as part of the reviewing process and should ensure that the prospective adopters understand the importance of this for the child and can commit to it.
- IRO to confirm arrangements regarding settling in letter to birth parents, including individual responsibilities within this ie ASW or CSW. This could include a settling in letter to older siblings who remained in long term foster care reassuring him that his little brothers were ok.

Decision to apply for an Adoption Order

3.11

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Under the Family Procedure Rules 2010, parents are respondents to an application for an Adoption Order, made under s46 ACA. They must, therefore, be given notice of the proceedings. The court will make the appropriate directions for the service of the application.

Parents may wish to seek leave to oppose the making of the Adoption Order under s47 ACA 2002. The test for granting leave at this stage is two fold: proving a change in circumstances (s47(7)) and the court being satisfied that it is in the child's best interests that leave is given.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- There should be agreement between each region and child's local authority about responsibility for informing birth parents, and individual responsibility within this. A letter will be sent by the local authority legal team to birth parents to notify them in compliance with Family Procedures Rules 2010.

However, additional arrangements need to be made to meet with the birth parents to explain what is happening; agreement regarding responsibility for this should be reached between CSW and ASW, depending on their relationship with birth parents.

Adoption Order Proceedings

3.12

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The involvement of parents during adoption application proceedings may be more compromised than at the care / Placement Order proceedings stage, as they are not automatically entitled to legal aid. Thought needs to be given, even though they may be seeking leave to contest or contesting the application, to providing support to them, particularly if they are not legally represented.



WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

The prospect of attending court, especially without legal representation can be completely overwhelming and daunting. In each case, it should be decided which practitioner is best placed to support the birth parents at this stage ie ASW, CSW, Reflect worker, depending on their relationship, and depending on whether they have legal representation and / or have obtained leave to oppose the making of the Adoption Order.

Practical consideration about how the parent will get to and from court, any specific support they need eg translation services; support from learning disability or mental health team; and who will be available after the hearings to support them.

Clear information should be given to enable the birth parents to understand the reality of their circumstances and the status of the hearing, if they have not been granted leave to oppose the order. Agreement needs to be reached between ASW and CSW as to whose responsibility this will be.

Whilst the child's timeframes always take precedence in considering any changes to the birth parents' circumstances, sensitive explanation should be given to the birth parents in explaining this. The birth parents should be given the opportunity of having information recorded about what they did at this stage which the child can access as part of their life journey. This can be beneficial both in terms of the birth parents' mental health and for the child to know in later years that the birth parents did what they could to strive to keep them.

- The presiding judge often ensures this information is captured in the judgment if the birth parents attend court but if this is not the case, the ASW should offer them the opportunity to record information which can be stored on file.
- The CSW to update the CAR/B following the final hearing to include outcome but also any actions taken by the birth parents.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

See the adoption support guide for guidance on the role of the adoption support service for birth parents.

See the contact guide for guidance on post adoption contact

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

It is not helpful to promote adoption as a “happily ever after” narrative as this can lead to the silencing of the adopted child and adults who may have to manage contradictory emotions such as grief and loss, joy and happiness (Featherstone and Gupta 2018). This framing can also lead to birth families not being able to articulate their losses and feelings of shame and sadness, and to adoptive families not accessing the support they need.

‘I feel like we are told we can’t show them we love them or what we are thinking about them but as a birth parent that doesn’t stop us wondering what they are like or what they look like when they grow up... We always have to consider the adopter but the adopters don’t think of us when they write the letters or how we would be feeling, it is all a bit one sided.’

birth parent

The benefits of working sensitively and proactively with birth parents post Adoption Order are well evidenced, both in terms of possible future children and also in terms of contact with an adopted child. Birth parents continue to hold the child in their mind, worry about them and that they will be forgotten, worry about what the child will be told about them and how they might be influenced, and that they lose pride in their cultural heritage. (Alper 2019)

‘The support I receive now from the adoption social worker is a good balance and the communication has always been there which has been a good thing because there has been many different types of questions that I needed to ask... just to talk about it, I think talking about it gets it out in the open, its quite dramatic really, what I have been through.’

birth mother

‘I think we need to acknowledge how painful it is for birth parents and that the impact of adoption is a life long thing for them too – I think our ongoing support through individual names social workers around letter box is good practice as you can build a relationship over a period of time.’

Adoption Social Worker

One poignant but very positive example of how responsive support offered during the current pandemic made a real difference involved a birth mother with mental health problems which had been further exacerbated by a recent cancer diagnosis and the fact her youngest child is almost 18 and the prospect of not receiving further letters.

The ASW had sensitive discussion with the adoptive mother about the birth mother’s health and offered support to share this with the children. They were able to talk about the benefits of ongoing contact post 18 which the family agreed to consider. the ASW was able to reassure the birth mother that the children were both fine and doing well; the birth mother received her annual letter from the adopters shortly afterwards.

The ASW provided information and advice to the birth parents about the option of registering with the General Registry Office and what this will mean. Information and advice was also given to the adoptive mother about birth record counselling for her children should they wish to pursue this in their own right.

“I only have to ring and within a few hours you find time to get back to me and explain the details. My partner (the children’s father) won’t ring as he feels too embarrassed, like we have no right to call... Because of my health problems and my mental health it’s important to me that I know that my children are happy and safe. It’s important to have the help to write a letter, so whatever happens I have written a letter explaining to the children that they were loved”

birth mother

If birth parents are involved with Reflect, the timeframe for involvement in a large number of areas is 2 years; for some this might not be long enough to affect sustainable changes particularly when needs are complex. Engagement from the birth parents might have been poor and this should not prevent ongoing attempts to engage and support.

- The ASW to have monthly update meetings with Reflect practitioner
- The ASW to complete re-assessment of birth parents' needs 12 months post Adoption Order as birth parents will have different needs arising from managing a more enduring social stigma (Broadhurst, 2019). ASW to complete an updated support plan

“Support from my social worker in adoption support in writing letters.....(has been helpful in sustaining contact) . Talking about my feelings and showing her photos. Having a good response from adopters that isn’t just a few lines. I look forward to this all year round.”

birth parent

Contact

Contact – both direct and indirect – can be painful as well as rewarding for birth parents. They might worry how it affects the child, might struggle with restrictions and rules or in finding the right words and topics to discuss (Young and Neil 2004). The challenges are compounded for birth parents with learning difficulties or low academic ability, and also for birth parents where English is not their first language.

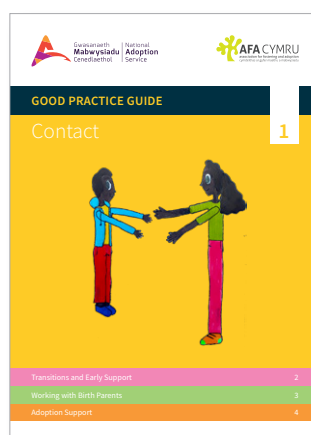
- Birth parents might not have retained information about contact arrangements so it important that the ASW help with this and discuss and provide any support needed to manage this (Neil 2006). This will include specific support with reading and writing letters as well as suggested topics that could be covered.

‘Not really, I knew it meant writing letters but not what to write or when. I wasn’t able to listen to people talking about adoption then.’

birth parent on understanding contact arrangements

Refer to NAS Contact Good Practice Guide

See Appendix 5 link to a podcast about a birth mother and an adoptive mother who developed a friendship based on their shared goal of doing the best for their boys.



Acknowledgements

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- Our reference group, which comprised of representatives from all the adoption regions and the voluntary adoption agencies and CAFCASS Cymru.
- The members of the NAS policy and practice group
- The regional adoption team managers and childcare team managers that were also giving of their time and expertise
- AUK Cymru, in providing detailed feedback and suggestions
- The responders to the questionnaires: birth families, adoptive families, foster carers and young people with experience of adoption

This guide would not have been possible without the cooperation and enthusiasm of practitioners within the Reflect service across Wales who generously gave their time, and to Cardiff University for granting permission to include a link to their Reflect video within the guide. Finally, to all the individuals within the regions for sharing such wonderful and inspiring examples of good practice across Wales.

REGIONAL COLLABORATIVES



North Wales

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham



Mid & West Wales

Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire



South East Wales

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Newport



Western Bay

Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend



Vale, Valleys & Cardiff

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan

ALL WALES VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCIES SERVICES



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Appendix 1

Sibling Alliance Call and Pledge

OUR CALL

“All care experienced children and young people have a right to have a relationship with their siblings.”

WHO ARE WE?

We are an alliance of organisations who are passionate about the rights of care experienced and adopted children and young people.

- Voices From Care Cymru
- Children in Wales
- National Adoption Service
- Adoption UK
- Fostering Network
- AfA Cymru
- Cardiff University

Care experienced young people have repeatedly told us of their frustrations with the lack of contact with their siblings in fostering and adoption when they have been separated. When consulting with children and young people about their health and well-being, what we found was that fundamentally relationships matter and play a significant role in the everyday well-being of children and young people in care. Spending time with brothers and sisters featured heavily in conversations we were having about well-being, happiness, healthy relationships, rights and transition to independence. Equally, many young people tell us the nature of contact with their siblings is not conducive to modern life, especially with the benefits of technology and social media. We have therefore developed the pledge below and are asking all professionals working within Children's Services and/or with children across Wales to sign up.

OUR PLEDGE

The pledge to children in care and their brothers and sisters

We call on all public sector and voluntary sector organisations who work with care experienced children and young people to agree the following.

To commit to using all available resources and optimise the use of technology to:

- 1. Provide information to children about their siblings**
Clear, current information about the existence of siblings will be given to all children and young people at every stage of their journey.
- 2. Record all sibling relationships**
All children's sibling relationships will be clearly recorded in all social care records and plans.
- 3. Implement lifelong sibling relationship assessments**
“Together and Apart” assessments will be improved by ensuring assessments are written and reviewed as lifelong sibling relationships assessments.
- 4. Record children's views**
Children's views on sibling contact will be transparently recorded as part of any early intervention or public law Children Act 1989 or Adoption and Children Act 2002 proceedings and statutory reviews.
- 5. Plan for continuing and meaningful sibling relationships**
Whatever the legal framework, individual, flexible and resourced plans for continuing relationships into adulthood will be followed, when this is safe to do so.
- 6. Review the language of ‘contact’**
Words matter. Young people frequently tell us how the language of care is professionalised, cold and stigmatising. Meeting with siblings should therefore be referred to as ‘keeping in touch’ opportunities.

Defn: Sibling includes full sibling, half sibling, step sibling by virtue of marriage or civil partnership, sibling by virtue of adoption, and any other person the child regards as their sibling and with whom they have an established family life [c. Article 8, ECHR].

Appendix 2

Who this guide is intended for, abbreviations and terminology

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

The guide is intended for use by all professionals involved with adoption and adoption support. These include:

- 1) The child's social worker (CSW). The child's social worker is the practitioner who, as an agent of the local authority, holds overriding parental responsibility for the child, through an interim Care Order under s38 and Care Order under s31 Children Act 1989 and, if a Placement Order is granted, under s 21 ACA 2002, until such time as an Adoption Order is made. The child's social worker is responsible for care planning for adoption and for the decisions in relation to family finding and matching with prospective adoptive parents. Their role cannot be underestimated and the guide is designed to assist the child's social worker, regardless of their experience in adoption work, to ensure that they meet their statutory, regulatory and good practice duties in relation to the child for whom they have responsibility.
- 2) The regional adoption social worker (ASW). Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements (Wales) Directions 2015 each local authority in Wales places the responsibility for assessing and approving prospective adopters, family finding, matching, introductions and placement, and adoption support to adoptive families and birth families, to one of the five regional collaboratives: SEWAS, VVC, Western Bay, Mid and West Wales and NWAS. The guides are constructed to help the regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies in the sharing and development of good practice across the country. It also aims to help the adoption social worker and child's social worker be clear on their areas of responsibility and where they need to work together. The 'ASW' refers to the relevant social worker undertaking a particular piece of work (assessment / family finding / adoption support)
- 3) The voluntary adoption agency social worker. Where the prospective adopter has been assessed and approved by one of the two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales, St David's Children's Society and Barnardo's Cymru, then there is an additional component, in that the VAA social worker works with both regional adoption social worker and the child's social worker.
- 4) The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO has a critical role to play in the care planning and reviewing for a child whose care plan is for adoption. The guides refer to the functions of the reviewing process throughout, in order that all those involved with a child's progress to permanency can utilise the reviewing framework for maximum efficacy.
- 5) The Children's Guardian. The role of the Guardian in care, placement and, sometimes, adoption proceedings, provides an important independent element to the process of planning for a child's permanency through adoption. The guides will provide useful clarity and detail to Guardians on the practice expected and developing across Wales.
- 6) Members of adoption panels. Quality assurance of the contact plan as part of the matching process
- 7) Adoption Support Agencies

TERMINOLOGY

There are few fields more sensitive than that of adoption where terminology – who is called what – is concerned. It is important, for the sake of legal clarity as well as a respect for the individuals concerned, that the same terminology is used throughout the guides.

- 1) Prospective adoptive parents remain 'prospective adoptive parent(s)' through the assessment process, approval and placement of the child, right through until the Adoption Order is made, where they become 'adoptive parent(s)'
- 2) The child's parent(s), that is biological parents, remain 'parents', as they retain their parental status until the Adoption Order is made, whereupon they are termed 'birth parents' to distinguish them from the adoptive parents, who now have full parental responsibility. However, for the purpose of the guides, biological parents are referred to as birth parents.
- 3) Child's social worker not child care social worker

Appendix 3

Full legal references to legislation and regulations cited in the guide

1.1 CARE PROCEEDINGS

PART 3 ADOPTION AGENCIES (WALES) REGULATIONS 2005 DUTIES OF ADOPTION AGENCY WHERE THE AGENCY IS CONSIDERING ADOPTION FOR A CHILD

Requirement to provide counselling and information for, and ascertain the wishes and feelings of, the parent or guardian of the child and others —

14.-(1) The adoption agency must, so far as is reasonably practicable —

- (a) provide a counselling service for the parent or guardian of the child;
 - (b) explain and provide written information to the child's parent or guardian on the following matters —
 - (i) the procedure in relation to both placement for adoption and adoption
 - (ii) the legal implications of
 - (aa) giving consent to placement for adoption under s19 of the Act (placing children with parental consent)
 - (bb) giving consent to the making of a future Adoption Order under s20 of the Act (advance consent to adoption)
- For (aa) and (bb) above see the NAS and Cafcass Cymru good practice guidance for adoption agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption.
- (cc) a Placement Order; and
 - (iii) the legal implications of adoption; and
- (c) ascertain the wishes and feelings of the parent or guardian of the child and of any other significant person the agency considers relevant in relation to —
 - (i) the matters set out in section 1(4)(f)(ii) and (iii) of the Act (matters the agency must have regard to):

(S1(4) The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others)

- (f) the relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including
 - (ii) the ability and willingness of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, to provide the child with a secure environment in which the child can develop, and otherwise to meet the child's needs,
 - (iii) the wishes and feelings of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, regarding the child.

The matters set out above have to be considered at the care proceedings stage, as, in all likelihood, the application for a Placement Order will take place straight after the Care Order has been granted under s31 Children Act 1989. A Placement Order, made under s 21 ACA 2002), cannot be made unless the adoption agency has made a 'should (or 'ought to') be placed for adoption' decision (s18 ACA 2002).

It is therefore necessary, during care proceedings and if the care plan might be for adoption, for the CAR/B form to be prepared and for the agency decision maker to make a 'should be placed for adoption' decision under regulation 19 AA(W)R 2005.

The CAR (Child's Adoption Report) is the component of the CAR/B form that satisfies the requirements of regulation 17 AA(W)R 2005 for the agency decision maker. The 'B' component represents the information to be provided that is set out in Annex B at the Placement Order application stage (Part 14 Family Procedure Rules 2010, Practice Direction 14C – Reports by the Adoption Agency or Local Authority).

The adoption agency has a duty to ensure that the child's parents have the information provided as set out in regulation 14. They are helped by the fact that the parent(s) will have automatic entitlement to legal aid and, unless they choose not to, will have full legal representation throughout the care proceedings and subsequent Placement Order proceedings. The parent's legal adviser will explain a great deal of the process to their client, but it remains a duty of the agency (here in the form of the child's social worker), to ensure that the process and implications of the making of an Adoption Order are made clear, through written material and through discussion.

The duty to provide a 'counselling service' to birth parents will be addressed by the regional adoption service taking into consideration the good practice principle of independence as far as possible.

Notification

AA(W)R 2005

Adoption agency decision and notification

19 (3) The adoption agency must, if their whereabouts are known to the agency, notify its decision about whether the child should be placed for adoption and any decision in relation to contact arrangements in writing to —

(a) the parent or guardian of the child

1.6 MATCHING PANEL / ADM

The Legal Framework

Adoption agency's decision in relation to the proposed placement

34 (4) As soon as possible after making its decision (i.e. matching panel / ADM, the agency must notify in writing —

(a) the parent or guardian, if their whereabouts are known to the agency; and

(b) where regulation 14(2) applies (where the father does not have parental responsibility but is known to the agency), the father of the child,

of its decision



Appendix 4

Key Performance Measures relating to Life Journey Work

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

There are two key measures within National guidelines in relation to Life Journey materials. The first measures the number of children where life journey material has been provided by Matching Panel. Life Journey material at Matching Panel is defined as

- a draft later life letter and draft life story book.

The second measures the number of children placed for adoption for who life journey material has been provided to adopters by the second review. Life journey material at 2nd review is defined as

- Preparation work with the child, (direct work using family trees, timelines, story books, ecomaps that would go with the child at time of placement
- Later life letter

plus either

- Life story material – a book or folder or digital record of information about child's birth family, reasons for being looked after and why adopted, or
- Life story work – product of direct work, often thought of as “therapeutic” as a means of telling the story of a child's life history to enable the child to understand their past. This may include memory box, and build on a life story book.

Materials like a memory box or photo book will not be considered life journey material unless they are set in a context of direct work.

(NAS Performance Management Framework)

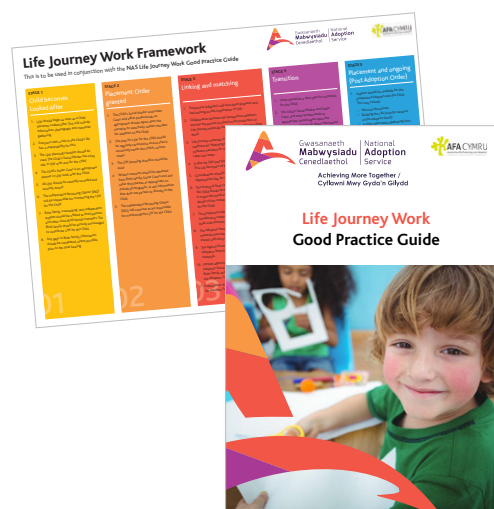
LIFE JOURNEY BOOKS

“I feel happy knowing that the photos, milestones, firsts and other anecdotes we have recorded have a place and will be shared with her as she gets older. We want her to know how precious she is!”
(Foster carer)

Photos taken during their time in foster care and then during transitions can be used as part of a number of Life Journey books created and supported by the team supporting the child and adopters. 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.

These books include:

- **About birth family book** – an explanation of some of the child's history
- **Looking after family book** – the child's time with their foster carers (and what foster carers do: look after)
- **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, and the activities that the child completed on their journey



Appendix 5

Podcast Two Good Mums

Two Good Mums is a podcast about the shared adoption journey of a first mother, Laura, and an adoptive mother, Peggy.

Laura's children, 'CJ' and 'RJ', were removed from her care and adopted by Peggy and her husband. Over more than a decade, the two mums developed a friendship based on their shared goal of doing the best for their boys.

Listen as they discuss how they met, began direct email contact and then face-to-face contact.

[Two Good Mums](#)





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