



## **EARLY PERMANENCE: INFORMATION FOR CONTACT WORKERS**

### **Why have you been given this leaflet?**

You have been given this leaflet because you are currently, or may in the future be, supervising contact for a child(ren) placed in an Early Permanence (EP) placement. You should also have been given the leaflet 'Information for Parents: Early Permanence' which gives detailed information about Early Permanence placements. In many ways arrangements for EP contacts are the same as for children in traditional foster placements; however, there are some key differences. Contact workers are important professionals in EP placements, often having regular contact with the child(ren), family and EP carers.

### **Handover arrangements for contact**

Unless it is not safe to do so, EP carers are likely to come to the start and end of contact sessions. These arrangements are made to minimise the number of adults that the child(ren) has to interact with. They also give the opportunity for the family to meet the EP carers, in recognition that these carers may in the future be the child(ren)'s adoptive parents. These interactions may bring the family some reassurance if the child(ren) goes on to be adopted, and will give the child(ren) the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of their birth family if they are adopted.

However, these interactions can also generate a lot of difficult emotions for both the family and the EP carers. Therefore, contact sessions are not the best time for parents or carers to be sharing important or detailed information about the child(ren), or trying to resolve any concerns that the family may have about the EP carers. As with all contacts, it may be necessary for you to direct one or more of the parties to the Social Worker or to your agency's complaints process.

### **Communication between family and EP carers**

The EP carers will usually be expected to keep a communication book of some sort (depending on the needs of the child/family), which passes information to the family about how the child has been since the last contact, any important milestones, any relevant questions etc. The family are able to write in the book to share information and to make appropriate requests. If there is an area of disagreement or upset, this should be passed to the Social Worker to resolve outside of the contact session and away from the child(ren).

### **Confidentiality**

Although the EP carers will potentially adopt the child(ren), they only become prospective adopters if the Court grant a placement order. This may never happen as the outcome of Court may be that the child or children returns to a parent or family member. EP foster carers **do not** have parental responsibility and **are not** part of the Court proceedings. Therefore, the only information they should be given about the contact session is that which is relevant to caring for the child, e.g. feeding, nappy changes etc.

EP foster carers need professionals to keep their details confidential from family members. The family should not know where the EP foster carers live or their surname. These details need to be safeguarded not just because of any immediate risks, but because of future risks to the stability of any adoptive placement. Ensure the child(ren)'s Social Worker gives you clear details regarding confidentiality arrangements on each individual case.

### **The importance of sensitivity**

Although EP carers are carrying out the role of a foster carer, they hope, if it is in the best interests of the child(ren), to adopt the child(ren) they are caring for. EP carers often refer to EP placements as like a “rollercoaster” – one minute things look like the child could be positively returned to their family, the next minute it looks like the child may need a plan for adoption. Therefore, simple comments like “contact went well today” may generate a lot of emotion or uncertainty for EP carers.

EP carers want what is best for the child and understand that this is always to be with their family if they can provide ‘good enough’ care. Therefore, they are balancing that they may only ever be a foster carer for the child(ren), whilst bonding with the child(ren) and preparing themselves that the child(ren) could be with them permanently. This is very different to a traditional foster carer who has made a clear decision to provide children with care until they can either return to their family or move to a longer-term permanence option such as long term foster care or adoption.





### **The importance of avoiding over-reassurance**

Parents can and do make huge transformations during Court proceedings, relatives that are willing and able to care for the child(ren) do come forward unexpectedly and circumstances do change. Early Permanence foster carers manage these uncertainties, so that the child does not have to. Whilst they have been assessed as able to manage this uncertainty, it is really important for professionals not to underestimate the emotional challenge, or for professionals to be tempted to offer reassurances that are not evidence based.

Early Permanence foster carers where a child has returned to their family, and those that have gone on to adopt the child placed with them through EP, both say that it is really unhelpful when professionals offer over-reassurance, even when well meaning. Stick to factual information only. It is really important to always remain mindful that only the Court can decide whether a child will return to their family or not.

### **Always remember.....**

- If a child returns to their parents or wider family, the Early Permanence placement did not 'fail' – children should always be with their family if they can be provided with good enough care.
- EP is in the best interests of a child(ren) when there is a likelihood of an adoption placement being needed for a child – the adults hold the uncertainty so that the child(ren) doesn't have to.
- EP foster carers are assessed and supported to manage uncertainties. Many people struggle to imagine coping with the EP carer role, but evidence shows it can be done well, benefiting children. EP carers just want professionals to remain mindful of the uncertainties that they are managing on a daily basis.

### **For further information about Early Permanence:**

- The child's Social Worker





Other Early Permanence focussed leaflets available:

- Care of babies experiencing withdrawal symptoms
- Information for family & friends of EP carers
- Information for medical professionals and administrators
- Information for parents
- Information for parents — easy read version
- Information for parents thinking about relinquishment
- Information for parents thinking about relinquishment - easy read
- Information for Social Workers
- Supporting carers and adopters with 'difficult' conversations
- The response to trauma in a baby or very young child

These leaflets are available from Adoption West.