



EARLY PERMANENCE: INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

What is Early Permanence?

Early Permanence (EP) is a type of planning which helps a child(ren) who has to be removed from their birth family to find a safe and stable home as quickly as possible. EP can be used for children of all ages where there is a possibility of the child(ren) needing a care plan for adoption.

I'm not sure about the terminology?

You will probably have heard the terms 'Concurrency' and 'Foster for Adoption'; Early Permanence is an umbrella term for both types of early permanent placement.

Traditionally 'concurrency' is usually when there is a Plan A (working to reunification with the birth family) and a Plan B (adoption) are being considered by the Local Authority. Whereas 'Foster for Adoption' is usually used when the Local Authority is more confident in a sole plan for adoption. However, experience has taught us that things can change considerably during EP placements, hence the use of the term Early Permanence.

In the early days of EP you may have heard talk of percentages. It is much more helpful to ground yourself, the family and the EP carer in the fact that whilst all EP cases involve children with a possibility of needing a plan for adoption, only the Court can decide the final care plan for a child. In all cases unexpected events can occur, therefore, EP carers can experience children placed with them returning to their family.

How does it work?

EP Carers have been approved to adopt, and are then also approved as foster carers for a child. EP placements mean that the children will receive foster care as looked after children, until such time as the Court decide the outcome of care proceedings.

If the Court orders the child's return to their family, these carers will support the reunification and they will only ever have been foster carers. However, if the Court grants a placement order, these carers will then become prospective adopters, going on to formally apply to adopt the child(ren).

Why use an EP placement?

Research shows that the longer the delay and the greater the number of foster placements, the greater the potential for significant negative effects on the children's mental health and development. Early Permanence placements are intended to lay the foundations for improved health and emotional wellbeing throughout the child's life, by giving more stability during the vital early years of development. Early Permanence placements are already showing positive results in reducing delay and securing better outcomes for children where adoption ends up being the path to permanence.

Placing the child into an EP placement means that their time in care will either result in the child being supported by the EP carers to return to their family, or that the child will already be placed with carers they have developed an attachment to and who will go on to become their future adopters. This enables the child to begin forming attachments as early as possible and safeguards the child from multiple moves. In an EP placement it is the carers taking on the emotional uncertainty on behalf of the child, so that the child does not have to.



I'm not sure if the child will have a plan for adoption?

Cases where parents have previously had children placed for adoption and there are no signs of significant or sustained change, or cases where parents have complex mental health, drug and/or alcohol issues, or complex learning difficulties may be appropriate cases for an EP placement.

There may be unknown information regarding the child, which increases the chance of the plan for the child changing in the future when more is known. An EP placement could still be appropriate for the child, provided that the EP carers know and understand that plans are inevitably uncertain at the initial stage.

Am I disadvantaging the family?

No. The legal tests for removal and whether a care plan for adoption is needed are the same. EP carers are foster carers until, and only if, such time as the Court grant a placement order.

Is an EP placement more work?

There are differences in the timing of the work involved. With an EP placement, you will be actively involved in the placement search and initial matching, including meeting the potential EP carers. However, as these carers are able to become the potential adopters, if needed, you should not need to carry out family finding later. You will still need to complete official matching and adoption processes to ensure that the EP placement is the right long-term match for the child(ren). EP carers will need more support than traditional foster carers, due to the uncertainty they are managing. However, there will be a Recruitment and Assessment (Adoption) Social Worker to support the EP carers and you.

How does family time work?

The EP carers will usually bring the child(ren) to and from family time, which will be supervised in the usual way. EP carers will have a communication book for sharing information about the child(ren) with the parents.

You have an important role in helping birth relatives and carers understand the benefits and risks associated with what family time means to the child. It is key to identify the support needs of the child, birth relative and carer, to ensure family time maximises its potential to facilitate the child's recovery needs.

Working with EP carers

EP carers are putting themselves forward to potentially care for the child(ren) for life, taking on significant emotional uncertainty so the child does not have to. This is different to the role of a traditional foster carer, who has planned to play an important but temporary role in the child(ren)'s life.

EP carers describe their journey as a "rollercoaster". It is important to avoid over reassurance about possible case outcomes. EP carers tell us that over reassurance, talk of percentages, guesses about the proceedings etc. are unhelpful. They have to remain focused on the outcomes being uncertain for them whilst win-win for the child.

EP carers may be approached many times about possible placements. They are assessed as being resilient and are provided with appropriate preparation training and are prepared to manage their expectations. Therefore, they may present differently to other prospective adopters that you may have met. Your visit may not be their first visit, several visits may already have taken place about other children for whom an EP placement was being considered but was in the end not needed. Please ask about any previous placement discussions, so you understand where the potential carers are in their EP journey.

It is important to keep EP carers up to date on important information, especially care plan changes. If you have explored a potential placement with an EP carer, let them know as soon as possible if they are not linked or if the placement is no longer needed.



Helpful tips:

EP placements should always be considered for a child(ren) where there is reason to believe that adoption may be necessary (The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010). EP is also appropriate in relinquishment cases.

Hold a Family Group Conference/Review Meeting as soon as possible to increase the chances of viable relatives being identified as early as possible; this avoids unnecessary EP placements and multiple placements for children.

Do not think about EP placements in terms of success or failure; if a child returns back to their birth family this is not a failure. EP is win-win for the child(ren), either they return to their family, or they have a permanent carer as early as possible.

Be mindful of confidentiality from pre-placement, e.g. will carers only be identified by their first names to the family? Remember you need to think of immediate safety risks and longer-term disruption risks.

Helpful resources:

Your Regional Adoption Agency

Coram BAAF: [Homepage](#) | [CoramBAAF](#)



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 Contact 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.

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