

## Fosterline Wales Factsheet

### Contact

#### Introduction

Most children in foster care will have some degree of relationship with their birth family, even if they do not return home. This factsheet helps you prepare for your vital role in managing contact.

The Fostering Network believes that:

- all looked after children have right to contact with family and friends unless their wellbeing and safety indicates that this does not meet their needs or is not in their interest
- foster carers have a responsibility to actively promote and facilitate contact where this is consistent with the child's wellbeing
- fostering services have a responsibility to support foster carers in their work in respect of contact

#### Contact

'Contact' describes the contact between a child or young person in your care and their birth family. This includes contact with their siblings and the wider family network.

Welsh Government sets out the central role of contact in the care of the Child Looked After in the Social Services Wellbeing Act 2014, Code of Practice 6 (Looked After and Accommodated Children)

<https://gweddi.gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/180328pt6en.pdf>

*50. One of the key principles of the Act is that there should be continued contact between the child and their family while the child is in the care of the local authority. Local authorities should work in partnership with the family and the child or young person to enable them to be reunited with the family where possible, provided that this is consistent with the individual child's well-being. Contact arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The child's well-being is the paramount consideration at all times and each child's views, wishes and needs for contact should be individually considered and regularly assessed. For many children, relationships with members of their family, previous carers, friends and others are valued. For some children some form of contact may provide a positive aid to a successful placement. Contact can be very important in helping children and young people develop their sense of identity and understand their lives and their sense of self.*

Contact can take place in a number of ways:

- meetings between the child or young person and family members

- phone calls, including text messages, Facetime and Skype
- emails
- indirect contact: letters and cards, usually delivered via a third party.
- digital contact via social media, e.g. Facebook

Meetings can take place in a variety of venues. A typical example is a family-friendly room chosen by your fostering service. It may be unsupervised or supervised, usually by a staff member. You may be asked to hold contact in your home, for example, when you are caring for a baby, but this will be only if you give your consent and following a risk assessment confirming if it is deemed safe for everyone.

Making arrangements that please everybody and are in the child's best interests can sometimes be complex and challenging to agree the details. The arrangements are set out in the placement plan for the child and detailed in the contact plan. The child's wishes and feelings must be central in all confirmed arrangements. You must be consulted, but it's essential you keep to the agreed arrangements.

The child's social worker manages and co-ordinates the contact plan arrangements and will support you to negotiate any changes and will review the impact on the child, in order to revise the next contact plan.

You should have a written copy of the contact plan arrangements, covering:

- frequency
- dates and days
- start and finish times
- who will be present at the event
- venue or location
- transport and escort arrangements
- a risk assessment:
  - is contact supervised by a worker?
  - is anything prohibited, e.g. the child and parent going out of earshot, subjects of conversation, who takes a young child to the toilet?
  - can everyone go out to, say, the park or must they stay in the designated room?
- Any backup contingency arrangement if these break down before or during the contact
- any other relevant matter. This can be something positive, such as an activity the child and family like to share or the parent preparing a meal for them all.

Your fostering service should provide financial support for transport and any other costs to do with contact.

### **Making contact work for the child**

You have a pivotal role in making contact a positive experience for the child or young person in your care and also for the family members who attend.

Family time can be conflicting for the child or young person. They might look forward to it and be worried at the same time. Remember that:

- many children see their parents as who they want them to be - not who they are
- contact may remind them of loss
- they might reject you and identify with their parents, or conversely blame and reject their parents
- contact can lead to over-excitement, challenging behaviour, anxiety, sadness or children being unusually quiet
- the arrangements may not happen as planned

After contact:

- consider the time travelling back to your home as a transition period back to the placement
- make time to be available so they have a comforting, dependable and consistent figure with them
- if it's practical, take and collect them
- be calm, patient and sensitive
- understand the feelings beneath their behaviour
- stay non-judgemental
- record their post-contact reactions and share with your supervising social worker

Contact can be conflicting for carers too. It's tough to see children upset or unsettled. Forming a working relationship with the birth family is an essential skill for foster carers. It is hard, especially if the family are unreliable, reject the child or criticise your care.

Feedback from carers suggests:

- remember, working with the birth family is in the best interests of the child. They will feel more secure if you and their family get on
- try not to be judgemental
- keep to the contact agreement
- be patient
- keep your records objective and up-to-date – what the child says and does before and after contact is especially valuable information

Your fostering service must offer the right support:

- talk about the issues regularly with your supervising social worker
- attend training and support groups – other foster carers have the same feelings too
- understand what birth relationships mean to a child
- be aware of your reactions to the birth family and how the child sees them
- allow the child to openly share their feelings about contact with you, what they like, what troubles them, their understandable uncertainties, without being judgemental.

### **Sibling contact**

Contact, between brothers and sisters, is important for these same reasons. Siblings may be living at home or with other foster carers. Sibling relationships may be the

longest lasting relationship a person has, and evidence suggests looked after siblings can lose touch with each other if they are separated. Siblings are significant for each child's identity, sense of shared history, validation of shared experience and feelings of belonging.

Arrangements should be made for siblings to have contact. Again, these will be specified in the placement plan and the details set out in the contact plan.

## **How The Fostering Network can help**

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

### **Advice**

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time, please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us at:

[fosterlinewales@fostering.net](mailto:fosterlinewales@fostering.net)

### **Support and resources**

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters.

[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

### **Training and consultancy**

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact our Learning and Development Manager, Sarah Mobedji at [sarah.mobedji@fostering.net](mailto:sarah.mobedji@fostering.net).

### **About The Fostering Network**

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

### **Contact**

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