

Multiple topics

Managing risks and benefits of contact with family members

This learning activity supports:

- Topic 9: Communicating effectively with children and young people
- Topic 15: Managing risks and benefits of contact
- Topic 16: working with birth parents

This exercise has been adapted from the Fostering Now Fostering Service Development Exercises¹.

Methods

Suitable for self-directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor. You will need access to the contact issues relating to a child you are working with.

Learning Outcome

- To consider the impact of contact on children, parents and foster carers and identify strategies for supporting them.
- To identify key areas in the social work role that promote good outcomes for all parties involved in contact.

Time Required

30 minutes review and 30 minutes reflection with a colleague or supervisor.

Process

Read the introduction and use the handout to consider the contact issues relating to a child you are working with.

1. Record the work that has been done, as well as the work that is required for each of the key areas in the handout.
2. Review your summary and identify any further work that may be needed.
3. Are there any barriers to addressing the issues in the hand-out?
 - If so, what are they?
 - what needs to be done to overcome them?

Introduction

Most foster carers accepted the need for contact... Their emotions, however, tended to be more stirred by difficult aspects of contact rather than the positive ones.

Fostering Now: Messages from Research (Sinclair 2005: 92)

Children usually looked forward to them [i.e. contact meetings], commonly want more contact than they get, but are nevertheless commonly upset by them (ibid: 91)

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Contact between child and birth family raises complex issues... Contact may be beneficial or harmful. Often the same child may have both kinds of contact (ibid: 95)

Patterns of contact are established early in the placement. They probably need to be a focus of work in the first three months. Carers who have undergone training related to contact tend to have better relationships with child and parents and play a role in contact arrangements. Only a minority of children were able to talk about the emotions aroused by contact (ibid: 94)

Policy and practice in foster care actively encourages contact between parents and children who are fostered. The research recognises the complexity of contact and the feelings and issues it raises and the need for support for everyone involved.

Key areas to address	Summary of work done and work required
Assessment of attachment between mother, partner and child	
The purpose of contact, its frequency, and who should be involved	
Assessment of potential benefits and risks of contact	
Indirect contact	
The appropriateness of venue; the wishes of the child; the role of the carer and social worker	
Sharing information with foster carers; have foster carers received training in promoting contact?	
Ensuring opportunities for child and foster carers to talk about contact to social workers	

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Key areas to address	Summary of work done and work required
The introduction of 'new' relatives	
Involvement of mothers and fathers in contact arrangements. What are the issues and barriers to contact for mothers and fathers? How will they be overcome?	
Ensuring contact is constantly monitored and reviewed	

ⁱ Research in Practice (2005) Fostering Now: Fostering Service Development Exercises