# Key questions for contact for looked after children

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor. You will need access to a recent contact arrangement.

**Learning Outcome**

To review whether contact arrangements meet a child’s needs and assess their impact.

**Time Required**

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

**Process**

Review a recent contact arrangement and assess the extent to which the following areas have been addressed:

* In what ways are the contact arrangements beneficial to the child?
* What are the perceived benefits of future contact and/or reunification?
* What are the emotional costs?
* Is the current upset to the child manageable in the interests of his or her longer-term well-being?
* How can this be managed more effectively for the child?

# Key questions for facilitating contact

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor. You will need access to a recent contact arrangement.

**Learning Outcome**

To review how contact arrangements can be facilitated to meet a child’s needs.

**Time Required**

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

**Process**

Review a recent contact arrangement and assess the extent to which the following areas have been addressed:

* What was the purpose of the contact arrangement for the child?
* What factors influenced the frequency, quality and safety of the contact?
* How were the wishes and feelings of the child, parents and significant others identified and met?
* To what extent was appropriate support provided for the child, birth family and carers?
* How could this be improved?

# Key questions for supporting and managing contact

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor. You will need access to a recent contact arrangement.

**Learning Outcome**

To review how contact arrangements can be facilitated to meet a child’s needs.

**Time Required**

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

**Process**

Review a recent contact arrangement and assess the extent to which the following areas have been addressed:

* How frequently were the effects of the contact discussed with the foster carer?
* What additional support did the child, parents, significant others require?
* What additional support did the foster carer require to support the child?
* How could you facilitate contact with other relatives, such as grandparents, as they can be a source of stability and continuity and can help counteract troubled relationships with parents?

**Managing risks and benefits of contact with family members**

This exercise has been adapted from the Fostering Now Fostering Service Development Exercises[[1]](#endnote-1).

**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)

*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 |  |
| 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 |  |

1. Research in Practice (2005) Fostering Now: Fostering Service Development Exercises [↑](#endnote-ref-1)