

Fostering and Adoption

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 Department
 for Education

Placement Stability & Permanence

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Permanence Statistics (2)

- In the year ending 31 March 2013, 11% of looked after children had three or more placements
- Teenagers aged 13-16 years when they become looked after, are the most likely to have three or more placements (Department for Education, 2013)

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What is Permanence

- *'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond'*. (Department for Education, 2010, p12)
- It is about having a 'family for life' and a sense of belonging and connectedness
- Permanence can be reached through different pathways:
 - return to birth parents
 - shared care arrangements
 - permanence within the looked after system (residential placement, unrelated foster care, family and friends care)
 - legal permanence (adoption, special guardianship, residence orders).

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The Impact of Placement Instability

- Reduces the opportunities for children and young people to develop secure attachments
- May exacerbate existing behavioural and emotional difficulties
- Has an impact on education and health care

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Permanence Statistics (1)

- Many children who become looked after return home quickly and do not need a plan for permanence
- 70% of foster placements that ceased during the year ending 31 March 2013 were for under one year
- 35% of those who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2013, returned to live with a parent or relative (Department for Education, 2013a)

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Placement Planning and Support

- Identifying the right placement for each child is key to stability and permanence
- Shortage of suitable placements may lead to decisions being put off until there is a crisis - leads to emergency placement and subsequent move
- Placement planning with older children is less proactive than with younger children

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Placement Planning and Support

- Children need to be consulted about their care plan: including children in decision-making can improve the quality of the decisions and lead to more stable placements
- Support should be a part of all care plans
- Carers need information about the child in order to prepare for the placement: placements made in a hurry, without consultation and full information are more likely to disrupt

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Unrelated foster care

- Foster care important permanency option
- Foster care is the most common placement choice:
 - 75% of looked after children are in foster care
 - 85% of these children are placed with unrelated foster carers
- The 'match' between child and carer is important for stability, importance of 'chemistry'
- Children living in stable and long-term foster care have similar outcomes to adopted children (Biehal et al., 2010)
- Stability is undermined if the placement is not supported
- Foster carers need to feel valued, involved in decisions and be a formal member of the care planning team

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Reunification

- Preferred pathway to permanence is a return to the birth family, but not always safe to do so
- Many maltreated children who return home do not stay there: around a third of children who return home re-enter care (Wade et al, 2011)
- Around half of those who have been abused or neglected suffer further abuse when they return home (Farmer and Lutman, 2010)
- Cases often closed within six months, even when there are continuing concerns

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Kinship care

- The Children Act 1989, encourages local authorities to place children with a relative, friend or other 'connected' person if they are unable to live with their parents
- Kinship care enhances children's sense of belonging through continuity of family identity
- Children placed in kinship care generally do as well as children in unrelated foster care

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Reunification

- It is important that before and after children return home there is:
 - evidence of improvements in parenting capacity
 - an effective assessment of risk
 - slow and well managed return home
 - provision of services to support children and their families, for as long as is needed (Davies and Ward, 2012)

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Kinship care

- Kincarers characteristics:
 - grandparents
 - have few financial resources available
 - often ill health or disability
- Despite challenges, often receive little support
- Support for kincarers is important as, where carers show signs of strain, placement quality is likely to be of poorer quality

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Permanence through adoption

- Around 5% of looked after children achieve permanence through adoption
- Around three quarters are aged between one and four years (Department for Education, 2013)
- Delays in the adoption process can reduce children's chances of being adopted
- Delays increase the chance of adoption breakdown - age at joining a new family has the most impact on adoption outcomes (Selwyn et al, 2006)
- Adoption provides much more stability than unrelated foster care, with lower disruption rates, although the rates converge as the child's age at placement increases (Triseliotis, 2002)

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Videolinks

- Hear Nina Biehal talking about [Four Types of Permanent Placements](#) as part of the Adoption Research Initiative