

# Contact

## Policy

Contact has a central role in the **Care Plan** for any child. The Children Act 1989 places a **duty** on the local authority to promote contact between a child/young person and his or her family, unless this is not practicable or consistent with his or her welfare. (S34 Schedule 2, paragraph 15) The only exception to this is where an overriding requirement such as a Court Order exists.

Standard 4 of the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes 2002 recommends that the child is provided with practical support for constructive contact and that written guidance for staff should clarify these arrangements. Regulation 15 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 gives further details of practical support and guidance.

Standard 10.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services requires a risk assessment to be carried out by the child's social worker and arrangements made for any supervision that is needed before contact takes place.

When direct contact is not possible, other forms of indirect contact must be explored and put in place unless to do so would not be in the child's best interests. Even when there is no obvious contact, the social worker and carer should endeavour to keep a child connected with their family background and to help them develop a sense of identity.

If the plan for the child is adoption, then a placement order or the witnessed consent of both parents is required before placing the child. Once a placement order has been obtained, there is no longer a duty to promote contact and any provision for contact under the 1989 Children Act ceases to have effect. However, contact must be considered in relation to the child's needs.

Birth parents can apply for a contact order under section 26 of the [Adoption and Children Act 2002](#).

## Procedure

1. The social worker must clarify and record the arrangements for contact on the **Placement Information Record** and **Child's Care Plan**.
2. The social worker should record the risk assessment and any supervision arrangements in the **Placement Information Record**, or if the plan is adoption then in the **Adoption Support Plan**.
3. The social worker should record the child/young person's immediate family on the **Child's Care Plan**, even when no contact arrangements are in place.

4. The social worker, in consultation with the team manager, should arrange a **Looked After Children Review** of the **Child's Care Plan**, if there is a need to significantly alter contact arrangements.
5. If contact has been refused, the social worker must provide the young person, the person with parental responsibility and the carers with written notification drafted in consultation with team manager and legal services. This should give the reasons, period of restriction and how to challenge the decision.
6. If contact must be stopped for more than seven days, the social worker should consult with the team manager. Consideration must be given to an application for a Contact Order under S34 of the Children Act 1989 and further legal advice sought. **See Legal Handbook 2006**
7. When direct contact is not possible, the social worker should explore other forms of indirect contact to put in place, unless to do so would not be in the child's best interests.

## **Guidance**

Research shows that the earliest weeks of a looked after episode are crucial to the success of the placement, the relationship between the parents, carers and the social worker, the level of future contact and the prognosis for an early return home.

It is essential that contact supports the overall plan for the child/young person, the family, the placement and the overall plan for the child/young person.

The needs, purpose and benefits of contact must be considered when identifying a suitable placement. The purpose of contact may change depending upon the purpose of the Child's Care Plan.

The social worker must ensure that contact arrangements are in place before or at the point a child moves to a placement. The social worker must consider the need to sustain links with all those in the child's network, such as friends, neighbours, school and out of school activities. This is especially relevant where the plan is rehabilitation.

In some cases, the need to identify carers who will facilitate face-to-face contact may be less significant where the child needs the stability of a permanent foster placement. Matching reports should record whether the placement meets the child's assessed needs, including those relating to contact.

For a child in care, contact can be refused if it is necessary to do so to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and the refusal is urgent and does not last more than seven days.

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