

## Assessments of Contact

"You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right".  
Rosa Parks

An assessment of contact can be part of comprehensive assessments, framework assessments of children in need and/or whole family assessments. They can also take place outside of these assessments where there has been identified changes in relationships, circumstances or previously unseen issues. They are undertaken to ascertain the benefits or otherwise of contact (direct or indirect) between parents, siblings, family members and sometimes other connected people.

An assessment should include the child/ren:

- Wishes and feelings
- Assessment of their holistic needs
- Assessment of parental needs
- Assessment of parent/s capacity to meet child/ren needs within contact
- A recommendation as to the frequency, level of supervision and by whom, duration and location.

The assessment is undertaken with the child's best interests in mind

Where Contact is advised the following information may be of help.

### Preparation and planning for contact:

- Initial meeting to discuss the contact arrangements, frequency (time), who is to be involved, venue and if the contact is to be supervised
- Parents, child, social worker, foster carers/residential worker and contact supervisor to all attend this meeting so that there is a clear plan in place, and everyone understands their role
- A written contact agreement is to be formulated, agreed and signed by all involved so everyone is aware of the expectations
- Clear expectations of the local authority support to parents in helping them financially to attend contact if there is some distance from the family home to the venue of choice. There should not be a barrier for the local authority to support the parents in attending contact.

### Contact between siblings:

- Contact assessments should always consider in the first instance separate contact between the sibling group in addition to contact between parent/s.
- Consideration should be given to the barriers to any sibling contact and impact this may have on each child. Many children are likely to derive benefit and enjoyment through sibling contact, but a minority of children find it too stressful because it evokes unresolved painful memories of early trauma.
- Consideration is given to a good quality venue for the contact to take place, one that is child focused and meets the children/s needs, particularly where

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Janusz Korczak 1925



there may be varying ages. The venue would need to offer the child a sense of safety and security and one that preserves confidentiality. Sometimes there should not be a 'venue' at all as confinement can be contraindicated and, in these circumstances, alternative arrangements should be made.

### **Contact sessions:**

- Foster carers/residential support workers or others will ensure a child is brought to contact on the scheduled date and time in readiness for contact with their parent/s or siblings. Sometimes, the child's carer should not be involved in the contact support, especially where this gives mixed messages. The child will always arrive at contact after the parent/s to ensure the impact of parent/s not attending can be kept to a minimum and ensure that no unnecessary journeys are made with the child. The expectation is the parent arrives at contact at least half an hour before the child to prepare the room and any activities they wish to do during contact. Lateness or parental DNA's are part of the assessment outcomes; however, contact should only continue with consistency, safety and predictability.
- Should the child fall ill or maybe refuse to attend contact then the contact supervisor is to be informed at the earliest opportunity to ensure that parents can be informed without making an unnecessary journey
- A contact supervisor will make observations of the relationship, interactions and parenting capacity within the contact session and this will be used to inform any parenting assessment. A parent will always have sight of the notes a supervisor makes. They are able to challenge any observations and sign the document.
- The contact supervisor will remain with the child throughout the session to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing
- The contact supervisor will challenge any incidents in the contact where a child may be placed at risk of harm and will step in to ensure the child's utmost safety. Equally if a parent is deemed to be speaking to a child in a way that is harmful then the supervisor will step in.

### **Special occasions in the birth family:**

- Where possible celebrations of birthdays/festivals and other special events should be given due consideration about a child attending any event with their birth family. This would be risk assessed by the social worker to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing and that it's in their best interests.

### **Reviewing and supporting contact plans:**

- A contact review meeting is to be arranged to ensure that contact continues to work, and any issues can be addressed.
- Contact should always be child focused and in the child's best interest and remains under review if significant issues arise in between reviews.
- Regular contact reviews should be held to ensure the contact is helpful for the child.

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- The overarching contact arrangements will be reviewed by the child's Independent Reviewing officer during the Looked after children's reviews to ensure the contact remains in the child's best interest.
- Changes to contact should not be made in isolation

**Factors that can cause contact with birth relatives to disintegrate:**

- Child is overwhelmed or emotionally adversely affected
- Scapegoating, favouring or rejecting of a child
- Adult supporter factors
- Disclosure, behavioural changes or requests to cut down change or cease contact
- Lateness or DNA of adult
- Coercion
- Adult is overwhelmed, over focussed, dissociative or preoccupied

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