

S U F F O L K A D O P T I O N A G E N C Y
**Guidance for social workers on birth family issues in adoption and
permanence planning**

Introduction

This paper provides guidance to social workers and their managers on issues which need to be addressed with birth families particularly birth parents when planning for adoption.

The documents mentioned in underlined bold italics below can all be accessed by going to the Adoption and Permanence A-Z page.

*Most children being considered for adoption now come to the Panels via care proceedings. To avoid planning delay for children, the Adoption Standards, the courts and our own policies rightly require us to engage in parallel planning and to present children for "best interests" recommendations before the end of the proceedings. We have a number of vital issues that we wish to engage parents in thinking about regarding their child's future. These are outlined below. **Unfortunately, raising many of these issues cannot be postponed until the proceedings are completed.***

The down side of this is that birth parents are asked to think the unthinkable about adoption before in many cases they have come to terms with the likely outcome of care proceedings- that their child will not be returned to them. It is not surprising that many parents find this engagement difficult. This attempt to engage parents will be among the most difficult tasks attempted by social workers. For some birth parents it will be impossible to engage however creative, resourceful, sensitive and tactful social workers are. However, we must use our best efforts for the child's sake and for the parent's sake.

*Discussion of the adoption plan should begin as early as possible given the constraints of the Court process etc. A **Permanence Planning Meeting** should be held within two weeks of the review decision that adoption is at least one of the parallel plans for the child. A member of the Adoption Team should be invited to attend (see **Who's who in adoption** for the team members to contact). This is an opportunity to think about how best to maximise the involvement of birth parents in the whole process of adoption planning. In cases where the children's social worker will find it difficult to address adoption issues with the birth parent, it may be appropriate for a member of the Adoption Team to meet the birth parent and assist in some of the consultation. This may help deflect some of the anger about the plan from you as the child's social worker. Try to judge the right time to offer the birth parent support from an independent source. This is their entitlement at any stage following the care plan being for adoption.*

This guidance paper in the form of a checklist with a commentary on the right is intended as the gateway to a collection of papers for working with birth parents. Most of the papers are hyperlinked to this guidance. Business support managers in the localities hold the leaflets of which we only have hard copies.

There are a whole range of issues about which we must inform, consult, assess and "counsel" parents. These issues are set out below.

There is no "one size fits all" way of approaching birth parents over these range of issues. In consultation with the adoption social worker, you may wish to consider in which order to do things and how to approach them in a way, which is most likely to bring a favourable response.

Practice Checklist for birth family issues in adoption planning

Tick Here	What to do	Why?
	<p>Show in your form E that appropriate information and “counselling” has been provided for the parents and child regarding adoption.</p>	<p><i>This is required by the <u>Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 7.(1).</u> “Counselling” parents doesn’t mean therapy! It means explaining the legal implications of adoption and procedures in relation to adoption and freeing for adoption and providing them with written information about the above topics.</i></p> <p><i>The BAAF leaflet “If your child is being adopted “ sets out what you need to explain to them. Then, leave the leaflet with them for reference.</i></p> <p><i>Obtain the leaflet from your local business support manager.</i></p>
	<p>Share your form E with parents well before the Panel date and seek their written comments about the form E and the adoption plan.</p>	<p><i>Our <u>Policies (2.5)</u> and the Standards now require that birth parents have the opportunity to give their account of events, comment on what is written about them in reports, make representations to the Permanence Panel and comment on information passed to the adopters.</i></p> <p><i>Please ensure that both parents have the opportunity to complete the form “<u>Birth Parents wishes and feelings about their child’s proposed adoption</u>”.</i></p> <p><i>If you can’t find the parent or they don’t want to comment, please indicate this on the form and the efforts you have made to involve them.</i></p>
	<p>Arrange, subject to its being consistent with the child’s interests, for birth parents to be invited to attend the Adoption Panel to express their views.</p>	<p><i>It is now our policy for parents to have the opportunity to attend whenever this is consistent with the interests of the child.</i></p> <p><i>Please make clear in the form “<u>Birth Parents wishes and feelings about their child’s proposed adoption</u>” whether or not the parent is attending and if not, why not.</i></p> <p><i>We have <u>Procedures for involving birth parents in permanence panel recommendations</u>.. Please have a look at these and then phone or email John Clifton to discuss how best to involve parents.</i></p>
	<p>If parents are able to engage, seek their preferences about their child’s future placement. Attach completed “Preferences” questionnaire to Form E if appropriate.</p>	<p><i>If the parent is ready to talk about their preferences for their child’s future, take them through the “<u>Questions for Birth Parents Regarding Adoption Preferences</u>”. This too is in the Pack. Attach their replies to the Form E.. If the birth parent is unable to address these issues at this stage, consider asking them later, at the matching stage.</i></p>

	<p>Assess birth relatives' future adoption support needs In relation to future contact. Complete form and attach to Form E.</p>	<p><i>The Adoption Support Regulations 2003 are now in force. They require us to assess this at the best interests stage. Attach this form to your form E. in future, the Panels will insist on the completion of this form. However, it is acknowledged that the social worker may not be able to give definitive responses until later in the process.</i></p>
	<p>Tell them about the independent support that they are entitled to from Post Adoption Link.</p>	<p><i>The Standards say that we must make independent support available for birth parents. We have an agreement with Post Adoption Link (Colchester) to provide this. Phone LINK on 01206 366078.</i></p>
	<p>Ask the birth parent to sign the medical consent form.</p>	<p><i>This form is also included in the Agency Medical Guidelines. It is vital to obtain this consent as early as possible to allow the Medical Adviser to obtain information on the basis of which to advise you and the Panel about the child's future health needs. It also provides for the child themselves to know in later years about their own medical history. See more about this in the Medical Guidelines.</i></p>

If you have a problem and need advice please contact me..

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Date: 07 09 2005