



2 SUFFOLK ADOPTION AGENCY

PROCEDURES FOR MATCHING/PLACING (WITH AGENCY ADOPTERS)

1. County Matching Meeting

- 1.1. This is the forum to which all child care social workers present children and consider possible families.
- 1.2. The agenda of children being presented to County Matching Meeting is discussed at the Adoption Team Meeting prior to the County Matching meeting.
- 1.3. Where possible, all adoption social workers with families waiting for a placement should check before this stage, the needs of the children being considered at County Matching Meeting (Agendas can be accessed on 'O'Drive (children & families/adoption/matching/agendas).
- 1.4. The Senior Practitioner responsible for County Matching Meeting will then be able to put forward possible families.
- 1.5. The child's social worker and foster carer will attend the County Matching Meeting. The information considered is the content of the Form E, Adoption Support Plan identifying the needs of the child and the Child Portrait completed by the foster carer. (See Matching Procedures for social workers on Internet Site/Adoption/ A-Z Adoption).
- 1.6. The child care social worker will be advised of possible families and Form F's provided. The adoption social worker will be advised that adopters have been put forward for consideration.
- 1.7. It is essential at this early stage that the adoption social worker and child's social worker make contact to share information, answer one another's queries etc before the child's social worker considers the Form F's more fully.

1.8. As the possibility of a match has been considered at County Matching Meeting there is no need to return back to this meeting if both social workers are happy to take this further.

2. Procedure To Progress Matching

2.1 Adoption social worker will then visit the adopters to share with them then child's information including medical reports.

A copy of the Form E, which should be anonymised, can be left with the adopters for their further consideration.

2.2 It is essential that these documents are treated as confidential and that the adopters confirm their agreement to keep them safe.

2.3 Adopters should be encouraged to make a list of any questions they need to ask the child's social worker. If adopters indicate their wish to consider the child further, the child's social worker will visit with their adoption social worker, to provide further information, up date information on child and answer any queries the adopter may have. This visit is also the opportunity for the child's social worker to ask questions and to consider whether the child might suit this family.

2.4 If the adopters decide against the child, their reasons should be noted on their file, as this will inform further matching decision by social worker.

2.5 If, following this visit, the decision is not to proceed, then this decision should be shared as soon as possible with the adopters, and they should be given reasons for this. This decision should be noted on the adopters file, with reasons as to why they were considered unsuitable.

2.6 Similarly, should adopters decide against pursuing this match then reasons should be noted and included on their file.

2.7 If all are in agreement to proceed, it may be necessary for the adopters to be given further information eg medical, psychological / therapist or school reports or for adopters to meet with significant people, eg Medical Adviser, Child's Therapist etc. A video may also be seen by adopters to help them to see what the child is like to live with.

2.8 Adopters should be given the opportunity to talk or most usually to meet with foster carers who are able to give day-to-day information about the child.

The foster carers views have to be included in the matching report. This meeting, if the match is pursued, can often be the first step in establishing a relationship between adopters and foster carers therefore both need to be supported at this stage.

2.9 Once the decision is made to take the match to Permanence Panel, the child's social worker and adoption social worker together complete the relevant sections of the Matching Report and Adoption Support Plan and a date booked to present this match to Permanence Panel.

3. Placement Planning Meeting

3.1 A Placement Planning Meeting is arranged at least 3 weeks prior to the Permanence Panel date when this match is to be considered. This should be attended by:-

- Adopter (s)
- Foster Carer (s)
- Child's Social Worker
- Adoption Social Worker
- Fostering Support Worker

3.2 This meeting is chaired by the Social Care Manager (Adoption) or Senior Practitioner. The purpose of this meeting is for all involved to consider the content of the Matching Report and Adoption Support Plan prior to their submission to Permanence Panel. In both, the child's needs are listed with corresponding information as to how the adopter(s) will meet these and what support is needed by all parties.

- a) It allows the opportunity for further information to be shared and brings together all those who will be involved in preparing the child for placement.
- b) Issues such as meeting birth parents and contact within adoption can be discussed fully.
- c) Should there be a good reason to seek agreement to a name change, this needs to be included in the matching report for Panel's consideration.
- d) Where an Adoption Allowance is required, it is important to check whether the adopters financial assessment has been completed and a calculation made as to the amount to be paid. If this has not been completed, then the adopters need to be given the financial assessment form to complete and this should be sent with all necessary documentation to our Adoption Administration at St Edmunds House, Ipswich, for forwarding to Finance for calculation.
- e) This meeting offers the opportunity for all to consider their availability and for an Introduction Programme to be completed to reflect this. This meeting may also identify any gaps in information and a decision taken as to how this should be provided.
- f) Discussions take place as to what material the adopters will provide to assist in the preparation of the child. The use of a family book, video, tape or large laminated photo's are all tools used by social workers and Foster Carers to prepare children to move. A decision will be made as to who will share this information with the child and when this should be done.

- g) Social workers may also plan to produce a “moving on book” for children to take with them containing a small selection of photographs of significant people.
- h) Arrangements for the preparation of child’s life storybook will be discussed.
- i) It is good practice at this point to provide both foster carers and adopters with a copy of the Vera Fahlberg’s ‘Moving On’ literature available for non-verbal and verbal children.
- j) The introduction programme needs to be discussed in detail. (It is often useful for both social workers to have drafted a potential plan for those involved to consider before coming to this meeting). The involvement of natural and other adopted children needs to be discussed. The distance involved will often advise arrangements.
- k) A date for reviewing introductions is agreed and a decision as to which member of the department will be present during the first meeting with the child and on the day the child moves to the adopters.
- l) Introductions may span from a few days for a very young baby to several weeks in the case of older children. Careful attention needs to be given that introductions are taken at each child’s pace, while ensuring that some structure remains.
- m) It is also important that the child’s social worker observes the child with the adopters during introductions.
- n) Any changes to the Matching Report or Adoption Support Plan will be identified and arrangements made for all involved to sign these documents prior to them being sent to Panel Coordinators.
- o) Appendix VII of the Medical Procedures should be sent to the Medical Adviser alerting her to the possible match allowing time to ensure that all medical information on child and adopters is available and up to date for Panel.
- p) The adopters wish to be referred to the Buddy Scheme should be discussed and if required, a referee made to Adoption UK.

4. Permanence Panel

- 4.1 The child’s social worker and adopter’s social worker attend for this item. In the event of either being unable to attend, discussion should take place with the Panel Adviser to make sure that the substitute person attending will be acceptable to Panel members.
- 4.2 A decision by the Agency Decision Maker will be available within 7 days of Panel. However, if introductions needed to start by day 7 or prior to this, then a request should be made to Panel outlining the urgency for an early decision and the reason for this. This is usually linked to a foster carers or social workers availability due to other commitments they are unable to reschedule and which would result in a child’s placement being unreasonably delayed.
- 4.3 Before any introductions begin it is essential that the adopters have received the Agency Decision Makers letter or in special circumstance, that we have

received confirmation that the Panel minutes relating to the match have been agreed and signed by the Agency Decision Maker.

5. Introductions Planning Meeting

5.1 This meeting is held prior to the start of the introductions programme. It is attended by the following:-

- Social Care Manager (Adoption) or Senior Practitioner
- Adopter(s)
- Child's Social Worker
- Adopter(s) Social Worker
- Foster Carer
- Fostering Support Worker

The foster carer may not need to attend this meeting unless there are particular issues which need to be addressed. However, if the foster carer does not attend then it is important that the child's social worker contacts her a day or two prior to the meeting to check whether there needs to be any changes to the introduction programme.

5.2 The purpose of this meeting is as follows:

- a) To share feedback from the Panel discussion and in particular to clarify any suggestions made by the Panel in respect of the introductions programme or contact arrangements.
- b) To check that all documentation required at the Placement Planning Meeting has been received by the adopters.
- c) To ensure that contact details for all parties has been provided.
- d) To confirm arrangements for the supervision of the placement up to the first Looked After Children review.
- e) To confirm or amend changes to the introductions programme.
- f) To confirm the date agreed by the LAC Coordinator for the first review of the placement, which will take place within 28 days of the start of the placement.
- g) To confirm the arrangements for adopters meeting the birth parents.
- h) To confirm the arrangements for both social workers to keep in contact with adopters, foster carers and one another.

5.3 Following this meeting, the adopters usually have their first meeting with the child(ren). For this reason, this meeting needs to be focused and completed as quickly as possible since the adopters will be anxious and excited about this visit.

6. Introduction To A New Family

6.1 **Initial Meeting**

Preparing the child for his/her first meeting with the prospective adopters will be the task of the child's social worker and the foster carers. The adoption social worker will have provided the child's social worker with the prospective adopters 'family book' so that the child may become as familiar as

possible with the family before the first meeting occurs. Preparation for this will very much depend on the willingness and ability of the child's foster carers to positively promote the concept of the move and more particularly, with the identified prospective adopters.

- 6.2 Ways of helping the child become familiar with the family will very much depend on the age and understanding of the child but, for example, showing him/her photographs of the family and the house in which he/she may stay, which should all be featured in the 'family book' will make his/her first contact with the new family less strained. Video's are considered to be a useful tool, even for very young children who benefit from getting used to images and sounds of voices. Similarly the use of large laminated photographs or a small album of clear 'face only' photographs can help pre verbal children to become familiar with the adoptive family's facial features. It is also essential for the prospective adopters to meet the current carers before any introduction, as this allows for discussions about the child's particular personality and needs. Through this and through their direct handling of the child, the prospective adopters will gradually begin to get to know him/her and in turn, become familiar to the child, and in this way the child and the adopters have the best possible start together.

- 6.3 Consideration must be given as to how to include birth parents in the introductory process. This may be a difficult time for them, as they will be facing up to the reality of someone else caring for their child on a permanent basis. Every effort should be made to encourage the birth parents and the prospective adopters to meet. While such a meeting can be a tense and difficult situation for all concerned, there are immense benefits for the child at this stage and later on, if the adults concerned can meet with each other and discuss what is going to happen.

- 6.4 The first meeting between the child and the prospective adopters should be in a place familiar to the child, as it helps him/her feel less anxious and behave more naturally. For this reason, the foster home should be used, but this may depend on the surroundings and facilities for privacy, and sometimes on the attitudes of the foster carers concerned. As the child will need the security of a known adult during this introduction, the child's social worker should also be present at the first meeting. Attention should be given to the timing of the meeting and where possible it should be arranged when other foster children/natural children are not present, to allow adopters the opportunity to focus solely on the child. Where it is recognised that the foster carer may find it difficult to facilitate such a meeting, they should be supported to do so.

- 6.5 Following this meeting, and every stage of the introductions, the child and new family must be given the opportunity to discuss their reactions to each other. It must be acknowledged that this is a time of considerable anxiety and that the depth and strength of everyone's emotions can be over-whelming. It is important that the adoption social worker remains in close contact with the family, to ensure that they have the opportunity to discuss their concerns and anxieties in relation to the proposed placement.

6.6 Prior to the initial meeting, children of the adoptive family should have been given information about the new brother or sister who will be joining the family.

Then inclusion in the introduction needs to have been considered carefully within the programme of introductions and the decision made as to whether or not they will be included on the first visit.

- The family could have a photo of the child in the family room or pinned over the bed that the child is going to occupy.
- Most existing children will want to be part of their parents' initial visit to the new child, but there could be drawbacks. Their presence could inhibit the inter-change between the parents and new child. It could make it harder for adopters to withdraw if, after the initial meeting, they feel the chemistry is not right.
- If the adopter's social worker can be present during some of the initial meetings between the child, the family and their new child, it can lay a good foundation for getting to know that child in the future. They will be familiar with the foster home and the child will associate them with their 'forever family'. If this is not felt to be appropriate, a brief visit during introductions when the child is becoming familiar with their new home can help the child to feel comfortable with the new adopters social worker.
- During introductions, it is important that existing children are seen on their own and helped to talk or draw through their initial impressions.

6.7 After the first meeting, the way in which the introductions will continue will vary, depending upon the age and the understanding of the child and should be considered in the light of the particular circumstances of the proposed placement. The Planning Meeting will have decided an introduction timetable and this should be agreed by everyone concerned.

6.8 The length of the introduction will depend on many factors, the most important being the child's age and stage of development. For a younger child, their short memory span must be appreciated, but it may also be important for an older child that the introductory visiting is fairly concentrated, so that the situation does not drift or go 'off the boil'. With older children, contact between meetings can be maintained through 'phone calls and letters. A balance requires to be struck between the need to devise a programme of introduction that is neither rushed on the one hand, nor prolonged artificially on the other.

6.9 Occasionally, the length of the introduction is shortened because it is recognised that the foster carers are unable to positively facilitate the introduction to the new family and the risk of moving the child into the prospective adoptive home is out-weighed by the risk of the current carers jeopardising the placement altogether. This is a fine balance and one, which should be discussed thoroughly and as openly as possible, including the foster carers and the prospective adoptive parents. If information is available before the introduction begins which suggests that the

current carers may not be able to fulfil this task, then alternative strategies should have been built into the introductory period.

- 6.10 Introductions will initially take place within the foster home, but then depending on the age of the child, will move to introducing the child to their new home.
- 6.11 The aims of the introductory period are to give an opportunity for both the child and the family to have an initial reaction to each other; to give an opportunity for the family and the child to become familiar with each other and the surroundings, and to give an opportunity for the child to withdraw and separate from the previous carers. The introductory period is often the start of the 'honey-moon' period, as children do not usually show their true character until they are well established in the family.
- 6.12 The effects of the child on the inter-personal relationships within the new family must be considered and discussed between the prospective adopters and their social worker. The effects on relationships with any other children of the prospective adopters is a major contributory factor to the success or otherwise of the placement.
- 6.13 Details of the introductory arrangements and an assessment of their success and difficulties should be clearly recorded on the child's file and also on the family's file. It is essential that the placement is monitored by the placement coordinator in each agency and that they effect regular and meaningful contact between each other. The coordinators have the vital role and responsibility for ensuring that arrangements are carried out efficiently with full knowledge of all concerned and to the satisfaction of the child and family.

7. Review of Introductions

- 7.1 This meeting takes place during the Introduction Programme to review introductions and to decide whether all concerned are happy to proceed with the placement.
- 7.2 Where a baby is being placed over a short period, this review can take place by the social workers involved in supporting the adopters and foster carers telephone one another to confirm that introductions are going as planned and to confirm that the placement should go ahead and that the baby can move on the agreed date.
- 7.3 For children over 18 months, it is usual for an actual meeting of all parties to take place, either at an office, at the foster carer's home or the adopter's home. It may be necessary to consider making changes to the programme in the light of any feedback from the foster carer for adopters or from any observations made by the social workers involved. Care should be taken not to allow introductions to be 'speeded up' unless this is seen to be in the child(ren)'s best interests.

7.4 All children must have the opportunity to say his/her farewells to his/her teachers and friends at school as well as saying a proper goodbye to his/her foster carers and friends in that locality.

8. Placement

It is important that either the child’s social worker or the adoption social worker is present on the day when the child is moving to his/her adoptive family.

It is the child’s social worker’s responsibility to ensure that any information or documentation outstanding be provided for the adoptive family prior to placement.

It is the adoption social worker’s responsibility to ensure that the adopters are aware of how to apply for child benefit, and to pass on to them our booklet on benefits and tax credits. Suffolk Adoption Agency’s Benefits Checklist for Adopting Parents and “Babies & Children” Social Security booklet BC1.

9. On Placement

The child’s social worker must complete the notification forms as follows:
 Notification of placement to Medical Adviser
 Notification of placement to Specialist Nurse (Child Protection) in locality i.e. Ipswich-Janis Scott (Endeavour House);
 BSE-Sue Sadler (Child Health Centre, Hospital Road);
 Lowestoft-Lorna Frew (Lowestoft Hospital, Tennyson Road).
 Notification of placement to Central Adoption Administration Team at St. Edmund House, Ipswich.

10. Post Placement Support

10.1 Support and Supervision:

For the child and the family, getting used to living together and becoming a new family can be a very stressful time. The prospective adoptive family has to adjust to living with the child, whose previous life experiences have, in all probability been very different from their own. The child has to adjust to new parental figures and perhaps new brothers and sister, all of whom are relative strangers. The child also has the problem of trying to put one set of parents in the place for his original parents or former carers – a process which often starts feelings of conflict and guilt in the child.

Support to and supervision of a placement is, therefore, very important to assist all parties in their new situation and to meet the statutory requirements of an adoption placement.

10.2 Regulations require that the child should be visited within one week of his/her placement with the prospective adopter. Following the initial visit, which should be made within one week of placement, further visits should take place weekly until the first LAC Review. These visits will have been arranged between the

child's social worker and the adoption social worker and will have been agreed either at the Placement or Introduction Planning meeting.

- 10.3 The Adoption Act 1976 states that the child must be seen with both adopters, so that the social worker can satisfy the court that "sufficient opportunities to see the child with the applicant or, in the case of an applications by a married couple, both applicants, together in the home environment have been afforded".

All visits to the child in the prospective adoptive family, or to the prospective adopters themselves, must be recorded in the adopters file and in the child's file. The two workers must agree early in the placement with the prospective adopters and the child, a visiting pattern which is seen as helpful to the child and family, and which meets the supervision requirements of the Act. Visiting patterns should be discussed and agreed at each Statutory Review.

- 10.4 The role of the child's social worker is as follows:-

- To supervise the welfare of the child's placement
- To help the child as far as possible with any problems there may be in adapting to the new family's way of life;
- To be the link between the child's birth family and the child and the adoptive family and to provide, where appropriate, the birth family with up-to-date information about how the child is settling in the new placement;
- To liaise with the adoption social worker and advising of any concerns raised or observed during visits.

- 10.5 The Role of the Prospective Adopters' Social Worker

- To ensure that all members of the family are comfortable with the placement and are receiving all the practical and social work support they require, including adequate background information on the child, details of and assistance with any letterbox or direct contact with birth family and advice on difficult behaviour.
- To discuss, monitor and support the effects the placement is having on all members of the family.
- To support the prospective adoptive family with any difficulties in the placement. The family's willingness to discuss these will depend considerably on the way in which the social worker has developed a professional relationship with the family and their general confidence in the Agency as a whole.
- To liaise with the social worker for the child through joint visits, exchanging a record of individual visits where appropriate and having telephone contact after individual visits.
- To advise the prospective adopters on the timing of their application to adopt and make them aware that this decision is agreed at a LAC Review.
- The adoption social worker will have a role in assisting the prospective adopters with the preparation of their application and where the adopters need

to be represented by a solicitor, to ensure that they are provided with the relevant information required.

- The social worker should also remind them at this stage about the role of the reporting Officer and the Children's Guardian and advise them that whoever is appointed by the court will be visiting them to see how the placement is progressing. This will not occur if a Freeing order is in place.
- In a situation where the Adoption Hearing will be contested, the agency's policy on payment of legal fees will have been fully explored and the family will have been made aware and advised as to the availability of appropriate legal representation.

11. Schedule 2 Report:

The child's social worker and adoption social worker both contribute to this report for the court, together agreeing the conclusions and final recommendations.