

West Sussex Permanence Policy

Children's Services

Permanence Planning Policy, Guidance and Procedures West Sussex County Council



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West Sussex Permanence Planning Policy, Guidance and Procedures

Executive Summary:

For the purpose of this policy, permanence is defined as *"a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of commitment, security and continuity of care throughout their childhood and into adult life"* (**Care Matters: Time for Change** June 2007)

The primary aim of permanence planning is to ensure that all children and young people who are looked after are provided with care arrangements that deliver this and provide them the opportunity to form secure **attachments (5.1)** to a parent/carer within a consistent and permanent relationship.

All permanence plans, including **returning home (5.2)**, should be made in the expectation that the child will be able to remain permanently with parents/carers for the rest of their childhood.

A detailed **support (5.3)** plan for the child, the carers/adopters and for the birth family members should be developed to sustain the placement until the child is 18 years old. This is irrespective of the age of the child. Early identification and decision making for children who will be unable to return home permanently should be a priority and in these cases every effort should be made to preserve the child's home and family links where this is consistent with their best interests. However, decisions in relation to contact should always take account of any potential for re-traumatising the child and disrupting new attachments to carers.

Children and young people should be helped to **understand (5.4)** their plan for permanence, including why they cannot return to birth parents, who they are to live with, reasons for the choice of placement and plans for contact. Life story work is designed to assist children to make sense of their situation when placed away from their birth parents. Practice guidance is attached as Appendix 5.

Any **changes (5.5)** to the plan should be fully discussed and the implications e.g. for legal status or contact explored and explained to all those involved.

Changes of placement, caregiver, school, or social worker must be kept to a minimum, and children should be well prepared for any necessary transitions as part of their permanence plan.

Children and young people's **wishes and feelings (5.6)** about who they live with and have contact with must be gained and taken seriously, bearing in mind their age and developmental stage.

Every reasonable effort should be made to **avoid drift (5.7)** and delay in care planning, and options should always be considered in parallel.

Placement of **siblings (5.8)** together in permanent placements should always be carefully considered, and decisions evidenced and recorded.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This document sets out the Children's Services policy in relation to permanence. It also provides guidance to social work staff involved in planning permanency for children and young people who are or may become looked after. It is important that colleagues in health and education services are aware and able to support this policy and approach.
- 1.2 It is known from research into developmental trauma and attachment theory that the majority of looked after children have experienced early poor parenting, neglect and other forms of abuse, which is likely to have impacted on all aspects of their development.
- 1.3 As a result, young people in care need the opportunity to form secure attachments to an alternative caregiver within a consistent and permanent relationship. Many have not had this opportunity and therefore, in order to redress the impact of their early life experiences, placement with permanent carers is needed at the earliest opportunity. Achieving this is the aim of the Permanence Planning Policy.

2. Definition and scope

- 2.1 For the purpose of this policy, permanence is defined as *"a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of commitment, security and continuity of care throughout their childhood and into adult life"*.
- 2.2 Permanence is also defined by reference to the child's need for attachment, security, continuity, commitment and identity rather than by placement type or legal status. This allows for permanence plans to be made for children and young people in a variety of different ways which recognise their individual needs, wishes and circumstances.

"The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work"

(The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, March 2010, Chapter 2, Care Planning 2.)

- 2.3 The primary aim of permanence planning is to ensure that all looked after children and young people are provided with care arrangements that deliver continuity, consistency and security of care and support. Delivering this will promote the child's attachment to their carers and develop a sense of security, self-esteem and identity.

This policy provides a framework for all professionals involved in permanence planning, and has been developed in West Sussex by a Permanence Practice Improvement Forum under the leadership of the Head of Children's Services.

3. References:

- The Human Rights Act 1998 (www.equalityhumanrights.com)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (www.unicef.org)
- The Children Act 1989 and Guidance and Regulations Vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (www.education.gov.uk)
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Revised Guidance and Regulations April 2011) (www.baaf.org.uk)
- National Minimum Standards, Adoption - April 2011 (www.education.gov.uk)
- National Minimum Standards Fostering - April 2011 (www.education.gov.uk)
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities – April 2011 (www.education.gov.uk)
- Private Fostering Regulations 2005 (www.education.gov.uk)
- Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook 2010 (www.education.gov.uk)
- Children Act 2004 (www.legislation.gov.uk)
- Every Child Matters 2002 (www.education.gov.uk)

Further Reading:

- Understanding Permanence for Looked After Children: A Review of Research for the Care Inquiry (Family Rights Group et al, 2013), Janet Boddy, University of Sussex
- Achieving Permanence in Foster Care 2008 (bookshop) BAAF (www.baaf.org.uk)

4. Permanence options - plan

4.1 Developing a permanence plan is a staged process involving parallel planning, where a number of options are explored at the same time before a final decision can be made.

The options for permanence are:

- to return home **(6.1)**
- be placed with relatives or other connected persons **(6.2)**
- be placed for adoption **(6.3)**
- long term fostering **(6.4)**
- placement in residential care (only in very rare circumstances and approved by a Senior manager) **(6.5)**
- planning for independence (for young people over the age of 15 1/2 when the Permanence plan is recorded as the Pathway plan) **(6.6)**

4.2 A permanency plan must be presented at the child's first statutory review. It is likely that this will be a parallel plan at this time. If this is the case the plan must clearly indicate which options are part of the parallel plan, together with milestones and timelines to reach a

single permanency plan. A single plan should be confirmed by the third review.

- 4.3 Legal Planning and Permanency Planning Meetings are meetings internal to Children's Services where plans are discussed and agreed. However, it is expected that the proposed plan will have already been discussed with the young person, family, other connected people and involved professionals to establish the child's attachments and supports.
- 4.4 A Permanence Planning Forum, chaired by the Permanence Planning Coordinator, will meet monthly to ensure a high level review of progress in all cases where a Permanence Plan has been agreed but not yet implemented. Management action will be expected where drift is identified at this meeting.
- 4.5 When the child's final Care Plan, agreed in Court, specifies the placement this will be accepted as the permanent placement and can be passed straight to the agency decision maker (ADM) (Permanence), for approval.
- 4.6 In the event that the child is placed with carers from an Independent Fostering Agency, the Access to Resources Team (ART) must be consulted prior to a request to approve the placement as permanent. The budget holder must agree the financial commitment for a long term placement with an independent agency prior to permanence being ratified by the ADM.
- 4.7 The process to approve a placement as a permanent one is set out below:
- Statutory review decision for the placement to be ratified as permanent
 - Social Worker completes BAAF Form C Section B1
 - FPSW completes the Linking Report
 - Foster carer provides a written statement confirming their request to become long term carers
 - Documents submitted to the ADM (Permanence) within 16 weeks of the review decision
 - The ADM will make a decision in writing within 28 days
 - The ADM will write to the carer and the child to confirm the decision. This should be recorded as a significant event on the child's record.
 - The ADM will inform the Permanency Planning Co-ordinator of the decision
 - Should the placement disrupt then the Permanency Planning Co-ordinator should be informed and the record amended

Principles of permanence planning

- 4.8 **Attachment:** Young people's secure attachments to carers are very important to their mental health and wellbeing. Continuity of relationships is also important, and healthy attachments should be

respected, sustained and developed where this is in the child's best interests.

- 4.9 **Returning home:** The decision to place a child home with birth parent(s) permanently should only be made following a risk assessment, where it is felt to be in the child's best interests, and is considered sustainable through to adulthood. If the child is a Looked After Child then the Care planning and review regulations 2011 (placement with parents) must be applied, with a clear timeline for revocation of the Care Order. The return home of a child who was previously accommodated under S20 should have a 'return home' plan and be reviewed within 10 days of the move (Improving Permanence for LAC – Consultation September 2013)
- 4.10 **Support:** All permanence plans should include a detailed support plan for the child, for the carers/adopters and for the birth family members in order to sustain the placement until the child is 18 years old. Details of support services available should be included.
- 4.11 **Understanding:** Children and young people should be helped to understand their plan for permanence including why they cannot return to birth parents, who they are to live with, reasons for the choice of placement and plans for contact, in an age appropriate way.
- 4.12 **Placement moves:** Changes of placement, caregiver (including respite), school, or social worker always contains some risk to the child's development and welfare and must be kept to a minimum. Children should receive preparation for and help with any necessary transitions as part of their permanence plan. All permanence plans, including returning home, should be made in the expectation that the child will be able to remain permanently with parents/carers for the rest of their childhood. This is irrespective of the age of the child and agreed at a statutory review.

The early identification and decision making for children who will be unable to return home permanently should be a priority. Successive changes of placement including respite and attempts at rehabilitation home cause great distress and damage to children's emotional and physiological development and should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible this must be considered before the child becomes looked after in order to inform immediate placement choice

- 4.13 **Wishes and Feelings:** Children and young people's wishes about who they live with and have contact with must be gained and taken seriously bearing in mind their age and developmental stage. Children's wishes and feelings can be gained verbally, through the creative arts and by observations of their behaviour and reactions to situations and relationships.
- 4.14 **Avoiding drift:** Care planning processes should be guided by the timescales and needs of the children and young people involved. Every reasonable effort should be made to avoid drift and delay in

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care planning, and to minimise the amount of time that children and young people are exposed to uncertainty about arrangements for their longer-term care. Reasons for not meeting the agreed timescales (below) should be explained and endorsed by a Service Manager.

- 6 months for the Public Law Outline (pre proceedings) to conclude. This is measured from the date of the legal planning meeting (LPM) at which the decision is made to commence pre-Proceedings, and 26 weeks for Care Proceedings to conclude from the date of the initial hearing and decision to proceed.
- It is expected that in every legal planning meeting (LPM), the Chair will consider how permanence can be achieved for the child concerned. In PLO cases or cases already in proceedings, the LPM will constitute the Permanence Planning Meeting (PPM). (Appendix 1 PPM form)
- As part of the LPM, all potential options for achieving permanence should be explored, particularly when it appears a return to living with birth parent(s) is unlikely.
- LPMs should always consider whether the child concerned needs to become looked after, or whether permanence can be achieved with family or other connected people, without the need for the child to become looked after by the local authority. With this in mind, exploration of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Child Arrangement Order (CAOs) as alternatives to becoming looked after should always be discussed. (see point 6.2)
- The minutes of the PPM must be available to the initial CLA statutory review and be ratified at that review by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) even if there are parallel plans in place at this point.
- Any subsequent LPMs should consider progress towards permanence.
- Relatives or other connected people who may need assessment by the fostering service are identified as early as possible. The Adoption Team should be informed of any child aged 5 or under as soon as they become looked after. Where adoption is a potential outcome, the adoption team must be made aware of the potential need for an adoptive placement. With these issues in mind, fostering and adoption workers should be invited to all LPMs where these are possible outcomes.

4.15 **Siblings:** Placement of siblings together in permanent placements should always be carefully considered as part of placement choice but care planning should be based on the individual needs of the children concerned. A sibling assessment (aka "Together or Apart" assessment) should be undertaken in all instances where the permanent plan for siblings is being developed (see Appendix 4).

This assessment should also make recommendations about future contact between siblings if they are not to be placed together.

5. Permanence options:

5.1 Return home

Exploring the family network - The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need, to support them staying together. Staying at home usually offers the best chance of stability for a child. This of course has to be balanced against the risk of harm to the child.

Prior to, or immediately after, a child becomes looked after, a Family Group Conference should be considered to assist the child, their parents and the wider extended family network to consider alternative placement options. If a Family Group Conference (West Sussex) (linked to MIN 17) is not convened the reason should be recorded.

There are unique advantages for children and young people in experiencing family life with birth parent(s) or, where this is not possible, within their network of wider family and friends. Therefore, every effort should be made to preserve the child's home and family links where this is consistent with their best interests. Placement options within the child's existing networks are set out in the Family and Friends Care Policy 2012 (West Sussex) (linked to MIN 17)

History -The narrative of the child's history, including positive and negative experiences of attachment, age, developmental stage, gender, health, personality, race, religion, culture and history of loss and trauma are all relevant to any consideration of their needs and vulnerabilities and should be used to inform planning for permanence and placement choice.

Contact - Contact with birth parents, siblings and extended family is generally a very positive experience for children and is to be promoted. However decisions in relation to contact should always take account of any potential for re traumatising the child and disrupting new attachments to carers.

For children who have been Accommodated (CA 1989 Sec 20) unless clear reasons to the contrary the initial permanency plan should always be return to birth parent(s). If this is not to be the case then a Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM) should be held to clarify what are the components of a parallel plan stating actions to be taken within clear timeframes. The notes of meetings should be made available to the IRO for the initial statutory review.

All children over the age of 11 will be presented to the CLA Monitoring Panel so that their plan and progress can be monitored. This forum can become the PPM, and a separate meeting will only

be required if the child is not presented to the CLA Monitoring Panel.

In these circumstances the meeting will be chaired by the relevant Team Manager or Permanency Planning Coordinator (PPC) in order to develop the plan. The record of the Permanence Planning Meeting (Appendix 2) must be included as part of the child's care plan, in time for the initial statutory review.

If a parallel plan and not a final plan for achieving permanence is presented to the initial review, a follow up PPM chaired by the relevant Service Manager should be arranged within 2 months of this statutory review, in order to agree the final permanence plan for the child and agree timescales.

The child's social worker and their supervisor should attend the PPM. Fostering and Adoption social workers should be invited to the PPM in circumstances where their services are or may become involved.

5.2 **Placed with relatives or connected persons**

If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure placement with relatives or friends. This will be either as part of the plan to work towards a return home or, if a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests, as the preferred permanence option. It is very important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child or able to support those caring for the child and this being the case a Family Group Conference should be held unless there is clear evidence that this will be inappropriate.

If a child is to be placed with family or friends carers this should ordinarily be within the legal framework of a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. Only in exceptional circumstances should this be within a long term fostering arrangement. (see Family and Friends Care Policy – linked to MIN 17)

The option of **Special Guardianship** should be regularly addressed within the statutory review for all approved permanent and long term fostering arrangements. SGO is viewed as a preferable option for permanence as it normalises the arrangements for the child and bestows parental responsibility on those providing long term care for the child.

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It will also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

The following persons may apply to become a Special Guardian:

- Any guardian of the child
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application
- Anyone who holds a Child Arrangement Order with respect to the child or who has the consent of all those in whose favour a Child Arrangement Order is in force
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for 3 out of the last 5 years
- Where the child is subject of a Care Order, any person who has the consent of the local authority
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility for the child
- Anyone, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply

The parents of a child may not become the child's special guardians.

Special Guardianship Orders offer greater stability and security to a placement than a Child Arrangement Order in that whilst they are revocable, there are restrictions on those who may apply to discharge the Order. The leave of the Court, if required, will only be granted where circumstances have changed since the Special Guardianship Order was made. However, the Order lasts only until the child is 18 and so is not as permanent as adoption.

A Child Arrangement Order may be used to increase the degree of legal permanence in a placement with relatives or friends, or a long-term fostering placement, where this would be in the child's best interests.

Where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, a placement with family or friends may be identified as a preferred option and the carers may be encouraged and supported to apply for a Child Arrangement Order (and this can be an application in private OR public law proceedings) where this will be in the best interests of the child.

5.3 **Adoption**

Adoption transfers all parental responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the local authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s). No future legal challenge to overturn the Adoption Order is possible and decisions about continuing contact will be made by the new parents (on the child's behalf)

The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if he or she had been born to them. The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK. The child is a permanent family member both as a child and adult. Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and

as a main factor contributing to the stability of children, especially for those less than four years of age who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family.

Adopters may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made.

5.4 Long term fostering

Within long term and permanent fostering arrangements the option of Special Guardianship (see 6.2 above) should be regularly addressed within the statutory review. SGO is viewed as a preferable option for permanence as it normalises the arrangements for the child and bestows parental responsibility on those providing long term care for the child.

However, long term fostering has proved to be particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption. It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the decision making for the child.

It can also be chosen because the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority. The local authority retains a role in negotiating between the foster carers and the birth family over issues such as contact and there is continuing social work support to the child and foster family in a placement that is regularly reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are met. The carers will not have parental responsibility, although certain decisions are delegated to them.

Where the final permanence plan is for the child to be placed with or remain with long term foster carers, a linking report (see appendix 2) should be completed jointly by the child's social worker and by the foster carers supervising social worker (who should have overall responsibility for ensuring its completion). This should then be presented to the legal strategy meeting or permanence panel, as appropriate, for agreement, together with the minutes of the carers last review. This will then need to be ratified by the IRO at the statutory review.

Once agreed and ratified by the IRO, the foster carers will need to have their change of approval agreed by the Service Manager responsible for the Children Looked After Service. If the placement is with an IFA the Service Manager will ensure that approval is also obtained from the budget holder and ART manager.

The social worker and FPSW should liaise with the carers to agree an appropriate celebration or marking of this important transition for the child and their carers.

5.5 Residential care

Residential placements are rarely used from choice. They are normally viewed as a stepping stone as part of a parallel plan to return home or other permanency plan. However for a small number of children with very high levels of physical, behavioural and emotional need residential care can be appropriate as a permanent placement.

5.6 Independence

For young people who enter the care system after the age of 15 none of the other permanency options may be appropriate, and yet planning for adulthood is of great importance for their physical and emotional well-being. From the age of 15½ a Pathway Plan is required and this should address the steps to independence.

6. Concurrency and Fostering for Adoption

When a child is being voluntarily relinquished or removed at birth from birth parents, consideration should be given to making a direct placement with prospective adopters who are also approved as foster carers.

In line with the Governments Adoption Action Plan and the consultation report Adoption and Fostering: Tackling Delay (September 2012) it is recognised that placing a child with permanent carers at the earliest opportunity is in the child's best interests. Under amended Statutory Adoption Guidance, approved adopters can be approved as foster carers by the child's placing authority to facilitate a "Fostering for Adoption" placement, without undergoing a separate fostering assessment. All children for whom adoption is a potential permanency plan should be considered for either concurrent or fostering to adopt placements.

Placing older children (2 years and over) with prospective adoptive parents approved as foster carers should also be considered prior to the Placement Order if this is consistent with their best interests and any risks can be managed by prospective adopters.

The timescale for a fostering assessment under Reg 24 or Form F is currently 16–24 weeks, plus 7 days for the Agency Decision Maker. These timescales must be kept in mind when planning legal timescales for Court.

Adoption timescales for completing a Child's Permanence Report (CPR) are 6 weeks and 3 weeks for the agency decision maker process. Again this must also be kept in mind when planning legal timescales for court.

Appendix 1

Agenda and Minuting Template for Permanency Planning Meetings

Name of Child:		
Date of Meeting:		
Attended by:		
Apologies:		
Subject		Timescale and person Responsible
Legal Status and any legal options being considered		
Current or Planned assessments being undertaken		
Specific individual needs of the child relevant to the permanency plan including issues of health, development, culture and sibling relationships		
Known wishes and feelings of the child		
Known wishes and feelings of the parents		
Permanency option	Any Action needed	Timescale and Person Responsible
Remain with or return to Birth Parent(s)		
Placement with Family or Friends		
Adoption		
Permanent or Long Term Fostering		
Residential care		

Note. Each of the permanency plans should be addressed. If elements of a parallel plan, actions should reflect how a single plan will be identified and by when. If the permanency plan option is not applicable please state N/A.

Signed:

Date:

Print Name:

Job Title:

Appendix 2

Approval for Long Term/Permanent Foster Placements

Linking Report

Childs Name Date of Birth	Framework number Legal Status	In House/IFA (please delete as appropriate)
Name of foster carer(s)	Date placed	

Progress in Placement

Please highlight observations of

- Attachment, warmth and positive interaction
- Educational support
- Support for social development
- Meeting cultural/religious needs
- Health needs
- Independence

--

Views in respect of current contact arrangements and how they may develop in the future

Please state any difficulties/challenges that are present and what if any additional support that is required. How will the foster carers manage the transition to adolescence and adulthood?

Has Adoption or SGO application been discussed with the foster carers. Please identify why application is not being considered and if this is a potential option for the future:

Contingency Plan in the event the foster carer(s) are no longer able to maintain care of the child:

Wishes and feelings of other children and young people within the foster home (FPSW and SW):

Wishes and feelings of the child. Please include the child's views in relation to siblings if placed together (SW and FPSW)

Wishes and feelings of the birth parent(s). Please include the views of other significant family members stating their relationship to the child (SW):

Wishes and feelings of the foster carer(s) How is delegated authority working and is there anything else that needs to be achieved? (FPSW)

The views of the IRO and other relevant professionals (SW and FPSW as relevant)

Conclusion and Recommendation

SW/FPSW Signature _____ **date** _____

Name _____

Recommendation and approval of the Team manager

Team Manager signature_____ **date**_____

Name _____

Appendix 3

Permanency Planning - Levels of authorisation Chair of Permanency Planning Meetings

When combined with the initial legal planning meeting:

- Service Manager Subsequent LPM's
- Service manager or delegated to Team manager
- All Children Accommodated: The CLA Monitoring panel chair until either the child is subject to PLO or Family Proceedings or return home no longer the primary plan

Any subsequent PPM can be chaired by the relevant Team manager or permanency Planning Coordinator.

The Agency decision maker for Adoption will approve all permanency plans for adoption. If at a later stage the case manager wishes to have this permanency plan altered this decision must be taken at a PPM with the decision forwarded to the ADM adoption for ratification.

The Service manager YCLA is the approver for all fostering placements to be approved as permanent. In the event that the approved placement is to change this must be addressed at a PPM and decision forwarded to the Service Manager YCLA for ratification.

Appendix 4 – Sibling relationships – a checklist

(Based on material from The Bridge Child Care Consultancy Service)

Note: See also 'Looked After Children: contact with siblings' (PDF) – update to 'the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 2: care planning, placement and case review' Feb 2014 Department for Education (linked to MIN 17)

Note: The term 'sibling' should be interpreted quite widely to include adopted, step and half sibs, foster sibs, cousins or other relatives who may have been brought up with the child whose needs are being considered, and even close friends. The latter may be more important to a child than siblings whom s/he has never met. Research has shown that sibling relationships are very important but apt to be overlooked.

1. Purpose

This is a basic tool for studying the way siblings behave toward each other and through this coming to a better understanding of their relationship. It is not primarily a means of deciding whether siblings should be placed together, and though it should form one part of the evidence gathered for such a decision, it should not be used as the only basis for that decision.

It can appropriately be used on behalf of children in a wide variety of family or residential settings where sibling relationships are causing concern or need to be better understood as part of future planning. It could, for instance, be part of a study of relationships on access visits.

The aim is to avoid the ever present risk of making unwarranted assumptions or drawing false conclusions from partial or biased evidence. This is why the check list focuses on actual, observed behaviour and it is essential to back up each statement with an example.

It can be helpful to compare relationships over time and in different settings, so notes about changes and whether a particular behaviour is only recent or of very long standing, may be illuminating. But the list should focus on the present.

Psychologists such as Judy Dunn have shown that behaviour patterns between sibs tend to be rather stable. However, the placement changes which occur when children are looked after by local authorities may provide opportunities to modify relationships quite profoundly. They can also put relationships under extra strain.

2. Who should be involved

This check list must be completed by people with first-hand knowledge of the children. Hearsay evidence will not do.

If the siblings are separated, they would have to be brought together for some of the assessment and some additional questions would be useful e.g. Do they try to keep in touch?

It may be appropriate for carers (past and present) to complete the check lists on their own or just with a social worker. However, very good results can be obtained by working on the lists in a group containing both past and present carers (including parents), the social worker(s), and any other people who are closely involved with the children as a sibling group. The presence of those who have observed the children at different times and in different settings helps to ensure a balanced picture and gives an opportunity to challenge allegations and assumptions. When it comes to the analysis, a group is really essential.

3. Completing the lists

Relationships are always two-way. What may be mainly positive for one sib may be very mixed or even mainly negative for the other. This means that it is important to look at each piece of behaviour from each child's point of view and then go on to consider more general aspects of their inter-action. All three parts of the list should be completed for each sibling pair. If there are several children in the family, the main features of each pair relationship can be brought together on a diagram using coloured pencils to denote positive, negative etc.

It is better to leave a question unanswered than to complete it on inadequate evidence. However, too many blank answers will indicate the need for further observation.

If a behaviour is found to vary greatly, it may be necessary to give several examples with details of circumstances. A pattern may then emerge.

4. Analysing and Interpreting the Check List

The first step is to examine the recorded behaviours identifying those which appear to be positive and which negative but remembering that both are present in all sibling relationships. The balance in this relationship will probably become evident, but it may be somewhat different or more complex than carers had previously realised.

Some types of behaviour have been found to have more significance than others in differentiating between a rich or a poor relationship. For example, sharing in boisterous play, resolving conflict through age-appropriate reasoning and reciprocal attempts to alleviate distress, all seem to have special importance. The latter may be particularly relevant for siblings who have shared the experience of separation from adult carers.

When attempting to interpret the meaning of the behaviour which has been observed and recorded and to understand this relationship, it is important to bear in mind the whole context in which this relationship has developed. Aspects to be considered include:

- the children's position in the family - a simple family tree may help here;
- gender;
- cultural and family expectations for each child;
- the emotional age at which each is functioning;

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- the extent to which the children have a shared history and family experience, and
- the role each child is perceived to have played (if any), in the sibling group's admission to care or accommodation.

The deeper and more accurate understanding which should emerge from the analysis will provide a more secure basis for making decisions about the children's future, for devising work programmes to meet their individual needs and for effective support for carers in managing and modifying behaviour.

Single relationship checklist 1

Child A	_____	DOB	_____
Child B	_____	DOB	_____

1.1 Behaviour of Child A to Child B frequency (select one)

A	Defends or protects examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

B	Recognises sib's distress and offers comfort examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

C	Accepts comfort from sib examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

D	Teaches or helps examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

E	Initiates play examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

F	Responds to overtures to play examples of this behaviour:	<table border="1"><tr><td>1 Often</td></tr><tr><td>2 Sometimes</td></tr><tr><td>3 Never</td></tr></table>	1 Often	2 Sometimes	3 Never
1 Often					
2 Sometimes					
3 Never					

G	Openly shows affection examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	---	-----------------------------------

H	Misses sib when apart examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	--	-----------------------------------

I	Resolves conflict through age-appropriate reasoning examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	---	-----------------------------------

J	Annoys, irritates or teases examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	--	-----------------------------------

K	Shows hostility or aggression examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	--	-----------------------------------

L	Blames or attempts to get sib into trouble examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	---	-----------------------------------

M	Behaviour sabotages efforts to meet other sib's needs examples of this behaviour:	1 Often 2 Sometimes 3 Never
---	---	-----------------------------------

Sibling relationship checklist 2

Child B _____ DOB _____

Child A _____ DOB _____

1.2 Behaviour of Child B to Child A

frequency (select one)

A Defends or protects
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

B Recognises sib's distress and offers comfort
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

C Accepts comfort from sib
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

D Teaches or helps
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

E Initiates play
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

F Responds to overtures to play
examples of this behaviour: _____

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

G Openly shows affection examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

H Misses sib when apart examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

I Resolves conflict through age-appropriate reasoning examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

J Annoys, irritates or teases examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

K Shows hostility or aggression examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

L Blames or attempts to get sib into trouble examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

M Behaviour sabotages efforts to meet other sib's needs examples of this behaviour:

1 Often
2 Sometimes
3 Never

Sibling checklist 3

1 What evidence is there of sharing:

	Examples
Boisterous play	
Imaginative activities	
Rituals (e.g. bed or bath time)	
Jokes and fun	
Secrets	
Other	

2 Are there marked differences between them in any of the following respects:

	Examples
The roles they adopt	
Activities and interests	
Behaviour	
Personality	
Other	

3 What evidence is there of reciprocity e.g.

	Examples
Pride in each	
Praise and criticism	
Mutual help	

4 Do they model on each other e.g.

Examples

Think they look alike

Imitate each other

Emulate the qualities they like

Unite in face of problems

Other

5 Other observations on this relationship

6 What are these siblings' own views of their relationship? (views of other siblings can also be very illuminating)

7 On the basis of all this evidence, sum up the positives and negatives that this relationship holds for each sib.

Date check list completed

Appendix 5

Life Story Work: Practice Guidance

Introduction

Life story work is designed to assist children make sense of their situation when placed away from their birth parents(s). Primarily the work will answer the following questions:

- Who am I
- How did I get here
- Where am I going

All looked after children who have a permanency plan aside from a return to residing with their birth parents **must** have a life story book and age appropriate life story work undertaken with/for them. This work should be an integral part of social work practice with all looked after children rather than an adjunct or viewed as a specialist piece of work and should commence at the point the child is looked after.

Working with a child to assist them in understanding why they are looked after begins when the potential for this action is discussed particularly if the episode commences on a planned basis. This being the case initial information will already have been collected by the time the child becomes looked after.

At the child's first statutory review the IRO should ensure that appropriate information and related objects (see below) are being kept with it being clarified who will keep these things safe and who will be doing what to ensure that this is maintained whilst permanency plans are being made and action completed.

Life story work is an on-going narrative for the child to ensure they maintain an understanding of the above 3 questions. The life story book is a product of this work.

Practice Principles

Life story work is a compassionate process that should reveal information to a child in an age appropriate way that is simple and clear. As far as is possible this should be free from unfounded opinions and judgments of others and remember 'you should never tell a child something that isn't so but there is no need to tell a child everything that is so'.

Work should commence with clarifying what the child knows and understands and the evidence that they have for this. It is possible that information will be contradictory with elements of fantasy however remember that some things which sound very unlikely may well be true so don't dismiss anything. It is important to collect as much information as possible so that this can then be sifted to provide as clear a picture as possible.

Primarily it is the role of the allocated social worker to ensure that life story work commences and is maintained. Challenging and distressing issues are likely to be best addressed by the social worker or therapist in structured life story work. However many children want to talk or hear about aspects of their life at unpredictable times and may need to revisit and repeat things. This being the case it is best that much of the work is undertaken by someone who has frequent contact with the child such as their foster carer or key worker. Alongside this all involved with the child should be encouraged to collect objects for the child's memory box and keep a photographic record of both key and everyday events.

Recording

Social work recording has to fulfil, a core number of functions particularly when involved in legal proceedings. For the purposes of life story work its important to remember that 'soft' information can also help the child at a later stage including providing a narrative around events to provide context. Gathering information retrospectively is much more difficult especially from family members who may be much less inclined to be helpful at a later stage. When taking photographs of birth family members remember to ask permission first.

Photographs of all social work staff involved even when only on the day of the children becoming looked after will be helpful.

As much of the life story work, as possible should be copied on to Frameworki, and agreed within the statutory review who will retain the hard copy. When a child changes placement it should be recorded again who has the hard copy.

Timescales

Whilst there are no set timescales for life story work as stated above this should commence as soon as known that it is planned for a child to become looked after. The life story book should be complete prior to a child being adopted or made subject to a Special Guardianship Order and likewise when a permanent foster placement is approved.

What Goes Into a Life Story Book?

The following is a suggested but not exhaustive list:

- Genogram completed in a child friendly format such as a family tree.
- Photos of the maternity hospital where the child was born and wristband if available. All details should be recorded of time of birth plus all measurements together with any information regarding prematurity or overtime. Plus caesarean or natural birth.
- Birth certificate
- Infant milestones as known e.g. first smile, tooth, words etc. hand prints and foot prints
- Photos of family members and mini biographies
- Photos and narrative from all carers

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- Without revealing addresses held as confidential show on maps where a child's placements were /are in relation to the family home
- Photos and narrative from social work staff involved
- Story of family finding
- A truthful and compassionate narrative of the child's history
- Anecdotes are particularly useful for the life story book

Be creative in presentation and ensure the child is involved as much as possible.

Quality Assurance

The Team Manager should approve the content of the life story book.

A Suggested Framework for Life Story Work

In order to help promote a child's current attachments to carers/adopters and in order to provide a more secure /safe place from which to explore past history, Life Story books should begin with where the child is currently placed and with information about their current carers/adopters. The book should then move backwards in time to cover past events/relationships and then come forward to the present again to reinforce the safety of their current placement and relationships. The book should end by looking at the future plans for the child.

The timing of Life Story Work and the use of Life Story Books will need to be assessed for each child. For some children they will not be ready to deal with very painful/traumatic memories until they are older while for others, even though it may be hard for social workers/carers, the sharing of trauma can lead to it being more survivable for the child if it can be borne by the important adults in their lives and feel less shameful. Usually children will be able to indicate what they are ready to talk about and will let you know if it is too much for them. Go gently.

About Families: this will include information about the birth family and foster families the child has experienced including any parent and baby placements.

About my birth family: This should include the following details:

- The specific details of where born and related information
- Why I was given my name
- Details about where I was born – this can include details such as local flora and historical information related to the area
- Places I have lived
- Photos of my family
- Why I can't live with my family

About my foster family: This section should be completed for all foster placements that a child experienced and include the following information:

- Who did I live with including the first names of other foster children
- Details about when I moved there and when I left including times of day, what the weather was like. What was I like and what did I do

- Include pictures of nursery, parks etc.

My for ever family

- Details of when I moved to be with my family
- Why did they choose me
- Who is in my family and information about where we live
- Photographs and additional key dates should be given

Decisions: This section should provide a timeline for who made what key decisions. This should be accompanied by photographs of the court and key social work staff including the Childs Guardian.

Further sections can be added that are relevant for the child and can include regular summary updates and key relevant points such as birthdays Christmas, starting school etc.

Conclusion

The importance of life story work cannot be emphasised too much. It will provide the child with the explanation and narrative pathway that will avoid the need for the child to either search for information and reasoning or to feel the need to fill in the gaps with half remembered or inaccurate information. Thought should always be given to who holds the information with additional copies available and particularly as an e record should the original be lost or destroyed.