

Manual:	Foster Carers Handbook
Title:	Contact (Foster Carers) FCH/005
Last Reviewed:	27/02/2017
Next Review Due:	27/02/2020

Introduction

The Local Authority has a legal duty to promote contact unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare. The Fostering Service therefore has a duty to encourage, maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan.

Research has confirmed the importance of the child's continuing relationship with parents, siblings and significant individuals as well as the value of regular, positive contact, in relation to maintaining a child's identity and their place within the family/community. This can be intrusive to your family life and routines, but it is an essential part of your work as a Carer.

Contact with a child's family is an important part of any foster placement and foster carers play a valuable part in promoting successful contact. The role of the Foster Carer in relation to contact can take a variety of forms. From supervising and facilitating contact, writing letters/diary to update parents, providing annual progress reports, or attending regular meetings between the child, parent and other significant individuals.

Contact can at times be stressful and confusing for children, so carers need to prepare children for meetings as appropriate, and give them time to adjust, or talk about their feelings both before and after the contact.

It is an expectation that Foster Carers will transport foster children/young people to and from contact where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Where a Foster Carer is unable to provide transport due to "exceptional circumstances" as detailed below, this will be discussed at the point a placement is agreed and at the Placement Planning Meeting.

"Exceptional Circumstances"

- **Evidence to confirm competing needs to deal with other children.**
- **Protection of Placement eg. identity/address of foster carer.**
- **Potential hostility from parents towards foster carer.**
- **Frequency of contact sessions.**

Contact Arrangements

When a child is Looked After a formal Contact Agreement should be completed setting out the issues, practicalities, roles and responsibilities of those in any proposed contact arrangements, including Foster Carers.

When contact is being considered in relation to any foster placement (either inside or outside of their own home) and deciding how the foster carer can assist with contact, a consideration should be given to the following:

- be clear about what time/space/skills the foster carer can offer before any placement is considered and these are discussed further as part of any matching consideration.
- be aware of the child's need for contact.

- where contact can be promoted safely within the foster carer's home this should be a primary consideration. This could also include the supervision of the contacts by the carers.
- acknowledges the child's background and family circumstances and the potential difficulties this may pose on all individuals.
- be aware that contact can be with a range of people who are connected to the child/young person.
- be aware that contact does not just mean visits, it can mean letters and phone calls.
- carer's also need to consider how and where contact can take place, as this may have a significant impact on the carers own family life.

N.B. All carer's can be asked to consider facilitating contact, however, it is a requirement, if appropriate, of carers on the higher levels. (Please refer to level requirements.)

Foster Carer Responsibilities

Foster carers must:

1. Ensure they have a clear understanding of the arrangements for contact at the child's Placement Planning Meeting, so that there is agreement and have an understanding between all the parties, of all aspects relating to contact (this should derive from the Initial Contact Agreement).
2. Try and establish a positive and professional working relationship between foster carers and parents/significant individuals. Regardless of the relationship, it is expected that Foster Carers are both positive and welcoming to any parties significant to the child.
3. Allow children to make and receive phone calls in the carer's home in private unless it is considered that telephone contact should be monitored in the best interests of the child.
4. Give children letters and gifts that have been sent from the child's family. The social worker will have decided if it is safe for children to be given letters unopened and checked. Carers must adhere to this and encourage children to keep these in a safe place. Where there are any concerns about the contents of any letters this should be discussed with the child's social worker.
5. Make accurate written recordings of the contact session noting the perceived impact on the child either before/during/after contact. This information must be fed back to the child's Social Worker both verbally and through written records and shared with all relevant parties. Support and advice can be sought from the foster carers own supervising social worker about what and how to write contact records. There is also training available around recording that carers must attend.
6. Comply with the agreed contact plan/agreement for any child. Any concerns resulting from contact should in the first instance be discussed with the child's Social Worker and/or your Fostering Social Worker. The Fostering Social Worker and the child's Social Worker will provide support to enable carers to deal with these situations.
7. Foster Carers should refer to the DCC Contact Policy where appropriate.